Sulfur 39

AIME CESAIRE CHARLES BERNSTEIN MICHAEL McCLURE

JORIE GRAHAM TERRY WINTERS MARJORIE PERLOFF

RON PADGETT RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS ADONIS PAUL CELAN

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FALL 1996

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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AIME CÉSAIRE

from CONFIGURATIONS

(Tr. from the French by
Clayton Eshleman
and Annette Smith)

Nothing delivers but the obscurity of speaking

torpor does not speak.
Thick. Heavy. Gross.
A precipitate. Who dared?
the quicksanding awaits at the edge.
At the edge of the sludge.
ah!
    there's no speech but in outburst.
To crush the sludge.
    to crush.

Coiling of the great thirst of being
spiral of the great need and great rebirth of being
nexus of algae and guts
nexus of the flood and ebb of being.

To speak of a delirium uniting the entire universe
to the surrection of a rock!

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

LIKE THIS

I put my dolly's dress on
I put my dolly's pants on
I put my dolly's hat on
And she looks like this
—Woody Guthrie

Sandblasts median procurement till spec-
ified tolerance—a gurgle a day
keeps the lineator aggrieved. Although
abjection never leaves you humming the
scenery when you enter right. Men
are from Macy's, women are from Gimbel's.
The shut-away was shut-in with shoe string.
"Keep those calls coming!" *This is the worst i-*
dea I ever had. Enunciated
or denounced, doused or detonated. Nev-
er sleep too long on a good conscience—the
world's not resting. "Both my Dads are over
six feet." These tears burn a hole in my pock-
et no bigger than the thimble on Tom
Thumb's thumb: big enough to drain the world. REAL
DADS DO DIAPERS. The map of Canada
reflected in the mirror looked like "US".
It's not the pan it's the burner. It was
a dream of a charade of a chance en-
counter with a pantomime & you were
wearing limes. **Let the hole out of this tub!**
I have put my order in affairs &
my musket in formaldehyde. GUYS LIKE
GUYS WHO GLOAT IN GUNSHIPS. *It's the lepre-*

chaun in you. Flush with days' inconclusive
display (forays). A month of Mondays. Roll
over Leibnitz, tell old Descartes get loose.
She melted in the noon day sun like so
much jello at a brazier pull. *New balm*
splints team. Fragrant chill imperils aban-
doned evacuation (evocation).
Make mine schmutz.

Till the top spills off the biblioteque
& the ground is splattered with tattoos.
Till Mildred mows the carbon slidings.
Till marsupials metabolize Mill Rift & Vivian
inventories the resurgent bumbles.
Till insouciance corroborates fact
on the ratcheting slopes of Mt. Interlope.

"Be quiet, dummyhead!"
Running onto
plane as door is closing, sitting in back
as it takes off down the main street of a
small town.
"And slow Joe showed his mother that
he had covered the holes in the contain-
er and none of the hot soup had leaked out."
If I have to come in and get you you'll
never swim again.
Sets the motor hum-
ming with garrulous incandescence.
Tum-
ble dry invective, as if you could re-
cant what you cannot sing.
Seance on Tenth
Avenue.
(Twisting tremulously in
the teetering tugs.)
For example, when
the trees sway in the breeze.
Fingered in the

line-up she forgave the errant witness
while condemning the circumstance.
As if
our mass culture inoculates us from
the need for any other kind of cul-
ture.
Slowing the way with trellises &
codicils, colloquy of inversion's
munificent paraphernalia.
Pumped up & then sucked dry.
Propriety
injures its own propriety; which is
to say the only good order is a
dead order or do sequins sparkle to
a tourniquet's timbre.
One law for the
lion & the lamb
is America:
an even playing field except for the
ones that own it.
Sorry when you mean glad-
handled.
Unfurl the flag to corral the nitwits!
If a computer could talk we
would not understand it.
(Layaways wast-
ing away in the imaginary
dream.)
Then again, two legs are better than
no legs at all.
Floor it & then liqui-
date yourself.
ALL FAILS FINAL.

"Then won't you buy my illusions
Almost new, gently used."

Laced with absolute grimace. If you've got

your wealth you've got next-to-nothing, good hedge
nonetheless. *Instinctively impaired.* At
Royaumont, the coefficient of sil-
liness was just around the hospital
corners. *That's the worst idea I ever*
had. In poetry, being off duty is
part of the job. Take it & pleat it. GIRLS
LIKE GUYS WHO GIGGLE. It's an irrecon-
cilable difference among us. Every
soul a rhapsody. Lost originals at
the tip of your fingers, fractoids of the
darkling kangaroo. A fissure of speech-
lessness framed by stutter of molten fab-
rication. Planting an idea in a
beanbag. **Schools are made to be broken.** Sur-
er than a pickax in an banana factory, implod-
ing swamps head windward. As if the galosh-
es could replace the rubbers, the goshes
overtake the rudders. *Tool and die*—thus
passes. A crushing croon squabbling with Brown-
ian inaction. "Go soak a rabbit
& then repeat that!" Terribly tenta-
tive, terminally tacit. *And if I*
mention Warren Sonbert, how can I ac-
knowledge that his films illumine the shad-
ow his death casts, knowing how hollow that
is. How his grace mocks the scourge of what he
refuses to name, as if to name hon-
ors. "The body dies, the body's beauty
lives." The song is not in the melody
but what comes after, in the space between
cup & lip. For we have been spared nothing—
but nothing is the one thing we might spare.
Bobbing & tossing in the crank. MIDGET
RATS INVADE PLUTO. Little by little,
no fooling. *This* is what I always want-
ed, to return to the replica of
the simulation in which I am borne.

MICHAEL MCCLURE

from APE MAN

NOTHING
TO
LOSE

black cardboard flashlite
in
my hand,
Mickey Mouse and Goofy
of rubber
under
one arm,
I stand in the basement
of the glacier,
THE LONE RANGER'S
BLACK MASK
over my eyes,
and
I
stare
at
NO SHAPE
in the light
that reaches beyond
the blackness
to the nowhere
behind the eyes

and
I
invent

the sacrosanct
with smell of lavender
powder
and
lacy boudoir

my
self
in the future

chained to my pain
AND
I
LAUGH
BECAUSE
I
AM
A MOUSE

A
WOLF

a cross-section of trees
rings around planets
in
the state
of
AGONY

AND
I
GO DEAD

DEAD AS THE BONES
of this elephant
stripped by poachers
in
the Serengetti,
and I bend over

in the mild sun
taking a piece
of the tooth
from the skull
in
my
hand
I
LOVE
YOU

No,
that's my
self
frozen
in
pain
in the ice

arm raised

my mouth
shouting a cry

PROMETHEUS
with no hungry vulture
only
the soul
that I'm building
echoing
back
allowing
the tendrils
of my body
to flow
in
one
direction
as I stare

GROWL

HOWL

CRY OUT

seeing you
in the morning

as the sweater
slips over your head
and onto the sheathe,
the soul, of your
B
O
D
Y

Your small breasts
and nipples of temples,
the blue of your eyes

as
I PISS

on the woman
kneeling before me
in the blackness
beside the pond
be
neath
the stars

STARVED
TO
SEE
INTO
the blackness

BUT
beyond the blackness
is
NOWHERE
where
I
am born
and matter
BEGINS
and the President roars
like silk and the dying
elephant
trapped
just behind me
in the ice
where the flashlite
beam falls
making a keyhole

*

BABY PICTURES

CRUMBS OF GOLD

No
size

to
this

being
for which

I reach

TRUNK IN THE AIR
in the glacier

as it all pours
around me

as I melted out
of all things
lifted by the wings
all over
my body
BUT
IT

is more
like a pool

a pool spreading
as the baby fat is spread
over the face
and the parents worship
the eyes that trap

them
in the grasp
of a new spirit
hot out of their loins,
their thighs,
like
their memories
of how this happened
to them
and they
become spirits
of meat with gold
seemingly
flecked
through them
BUT
the whole
thing is to
KNOW

and
I
know
it all
BUT
it has edges
way out past where
I
can reach
with my senses

AT
THE
LIMITS
OF
THE
MOTH'S WORLD
OF
SENSES

I
AM
ALL
SENSE
ALL MEAT IS MEAT
is gold
or darkness
or
self

smiling at self

while an aura
of rose petals and eider down
flows in a pool
round
my head
on
the

floor

OLD MAN

BEING

being
born
into a baby
to grow into
an
APE MAN

OWNER OF A HOUSE
with
a black
car
with a breaking clutch

and dreams
of an open cabinet stripped
of its contents

STEAL CHAOS
and put it
in this cabinet
so
it
has
a shape
in the darkness
smiling at self
while an aura
of rose petals and eider down
flow in a pool round
my head
on
the
floor

and

I
HOLD

OUT
THE
CORN

in the woven basket

AND
THE
SHIT
that I am,
that Artaud denounces
moves curling
and breaking
in the clear pool
Blake says
I AM THE DESCENT
of Soul
into
MATTER
but
that's not right
not unless Soul
is the blackness
behind
my eyes

AND
EVEN

THE MOTH

has edges and spots

in the shapes

of the three owls

who
hoot
in
the glen

like the shit
roiling

in
the
pool

as the piss
falls

on her face or on the pink
cyclamen

that D. H. Lawrence sees
in the Italian forest

while the elephants
come out of the trees

AND
PARADE

around
in their childhoods
and parenthoods
and
a
zebra
passes by

and a mouse stirs

W.B. KECKLER

ABORIGINAL (NUMBER TWO)

Mnemonic light of rushes.

You're tiny light inside a flare gem.

Caught encoding trees reaching wind
you say sound wallows there
in self-pity.

Red through cave walls.

Emu circles different levels
of consciousness,
eggs ready to sing-break.

Open the life-force again.
States of movement as the tendrils
of plants.

* * *

Large pink travels. I can't remember.
Are you an egg? And its rotund light?
Herringbone breath patterns cross desert,
celestial headgear against dark space.

* * *

Constellations cross an earthly singing
style and vanish in Milky Way Fish
singing low.

The city lit at desert's edge is leaking
straight poisons. Arrows alive.

All the crabs are emanating from its center.

Bush dreaming on my hands, sleeping.
My head is a mudhole.

The Dream walking into the vortext
wears a pretty headdress.

Are you sleepy two?

The message obliterates the world.
Obliterates the word,
and we are grateful.

Swallowing it whole, the music, star-mosaic and milk.

They stare and the stars begin to root.
Begin to root in their eyes.

They stare above into hot scrap and tile is done.

Welcome to the losing edge of breathing.

DAVE SHORTT

TWO POEMS

BETWEEN ICE AGES

ordovician limestone
crushed and scarfed up

with precambrian iron
and timber first materializing
2 billion years later
forming the malled
westgate of the city .

a mobile
god, with facility
in constructing opaque or glassy
views .

a gypsum sky to the south
to the north a blue of subsumed
relaxation
fuming above drifted,
compacted sandstone .

where nut trees once flourished
a horticulture of popcorn
hustles us through
the planes of a screen-play
(where is a head mounted
on the Boom that moves
through the neo-realisms of space-time

and the paleo-seasonalisms
of culture?)

desire is telethoned
across copper intricate as fingerprints
over the hinterlands to where hunters
stalk in fluorescence

delis are venisonless ,
are signed
with the encased entrails
of swine,
wherein a great passing is taking place:
the football of the biosphere
is being kicked & passed,
dropped here & there,
a mammoth in
the most memorable storm

MINUS 27 F.

red neon against intaglioed frost
on windowpane

steam in silhouette,
tenuous jinni
of warmth

flapping flags of the state,
of a precariously sewn dignity

as the traction of cars
on ice-streets

illuminated electrically,
trees as if embalmed
against encoded indoor laughter
phoned out past them & the dead poles,
quick as paisanos & fellahin've come
to phoneticize their mealtimes
(mediterranean restaurants icicled & feeding)

the fire hasn't gone out
since before Peking man
but how impossible to feel
the degree of warmth felt
by pre-Colombian folk
and did they enter winter without
aversion to things
frozen secular?
(unsacred salt preventing death-skid
while migrating)

stars flashing above storefront beer-words
enunciating another kind of mammal-glow:

somewhere critters
in vast concentration
over light year distances

staring irrational into
unconstellated furnaces,

eye into
fusioning eye

ANNE CORAY

THREE POEMS

VOWEL SOUNDS

"Insipid" for me is a cold word,
not dull, but willing a mean energy,
a missile in my mouth.

Granted, consonants may modulate the bounds,
but it's the quick stick of the short i
that fits in "bitter," "snip," or "flippant,"

as the soft, lazy o belongs in "cotton" or "flow."
A's have the aura of the sage:
they stand like an axiom of stability.

Who are the u's? The ugly ones.
The ones that range from "Brutus" to "slum,"
that inhabit "muck," "unscrupulous," and "klutz."

And there are those that speak of time—
long i's and e's—
lengthening "flight" and "memories."

Memories—whose first e is a shell.
a tender, eloquent bell
that rests within a petaled hour.
It is your feathered breath,
your lightened power,
your gentle motions
before you drift to sleep.

NEW IMAGE

When January in its thin blanket
filtered blue the coastline
of Tanalian

all that was lost
fluttered in an echo, pale yellow
over the snow's hard crust.

Knee-deep, on an ancient trail
I floundered and fell, face-first.
Tooth cut lip; it bled,

pooled onto the glaze of ice.
The moon was up.
I saw the wings of a red raven,

something flapped and cawed—
purple, and strong,
a mix of night and bird.

Lake Clark: Named in 1891 by reporter A.B. Schanz of the *Frank Leslie Illustrated Newspaper* expedition for John W. Clark, chief of the Nushagak Trading Post, who "discovered" the lake.
(quotations mine)

IN THE MARGIN

Qizhjeh Vena
"many peoples gather"
long before ink, the lake's
Dena'ina name.

This image, sketched
from the mound
and gorge of tongue:
campfires reflected
in glacial water.

Around them, bodies rise—
aged and unfledged bones,
thick forests, rock-
topped mountains.

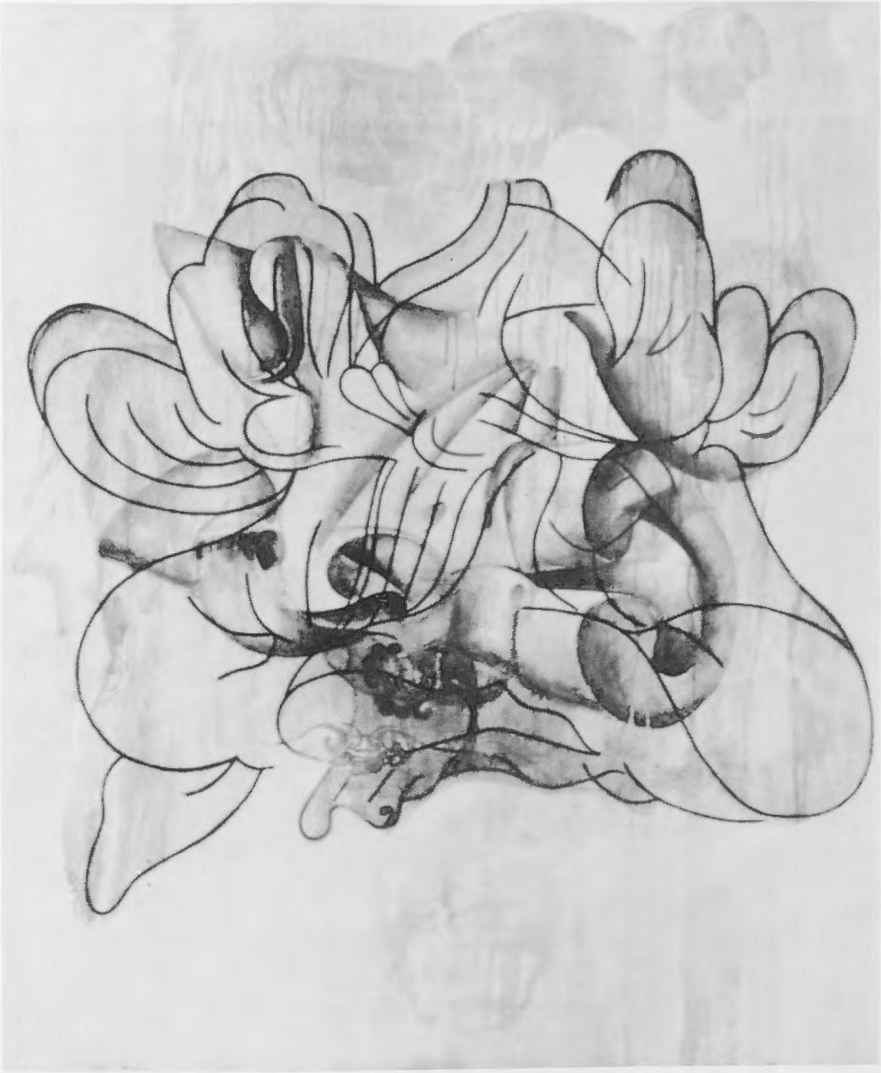
Something remains—
a flicker: long undated
passages, the press
of hand-sewn boots

made from skins
of vejex, caribou
k'uhda'i, moose.

EMILY CHANG

EIGHT PAINTINGS

Contested
Oil/Linen, 1995, 54" x 58"



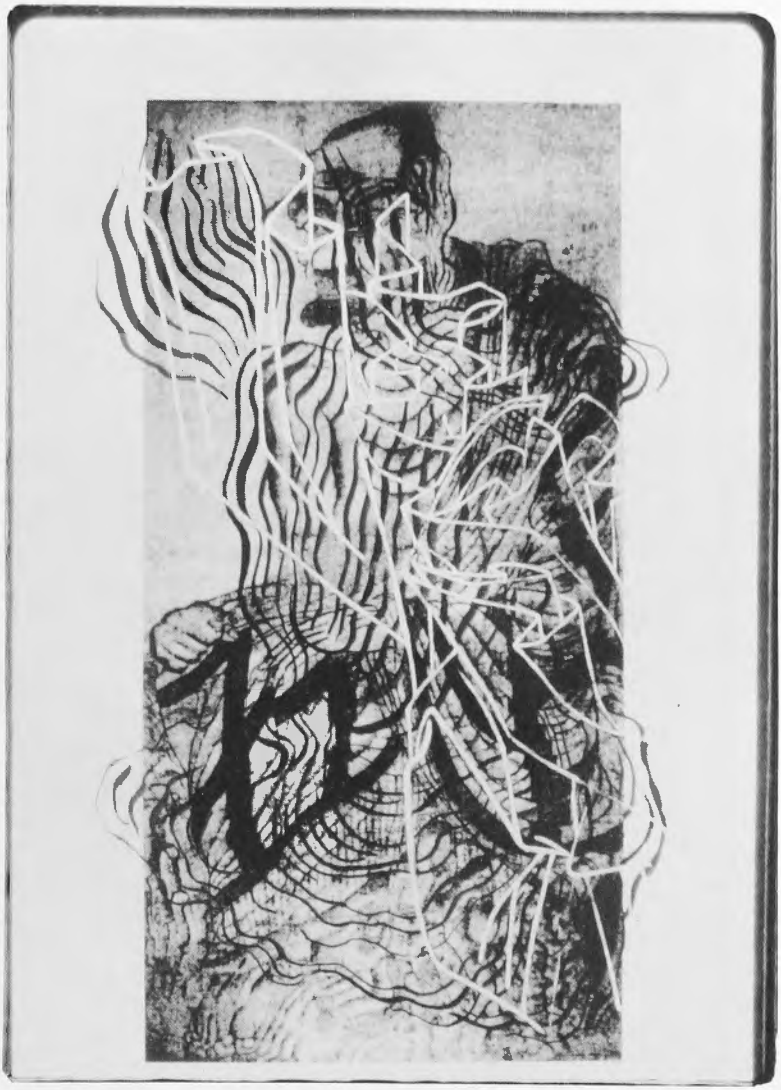
Shifting Fundamentals
Oil/Canvas, 1989/1995, 54" x 44"

Interior Conditions
Oil/Canvas, 1989/1995, 54" x 44"

Continuum
Oil/Linen, 1995, 54" x 48"

Untitled
Digital Iris Print, 1995, 46" x 34"

Untitled
Digital Iris Print, 1995, 46" x 34"



Untitled
Digital Iris Print, 1995, 46" x 34"

Comingle
Oil/Linen, 1995, 54" x 48"

PAMELA WYE

EMILY CHENG: EVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

"Florid flying drapery," "busy play of line," "calligraphic elegance," "nervous excitement." J.J. Pollitt uses these phrases to describe Hellenistic sculpture in *Art and Experience in Classical Greece*, but they could also be used to describe Emily Cheng's recent paintings. Hellenistic sculpture reflected a period of social upheaval in Greece, when the balance, stability and restraint of Classical sculpture became impregnated with heightened emotion and motion, and a resurgence of Eastern influence evidenced by elaborate surface patterning in the ever increasing swirls of drapery.

Like a spider's web, the systematic yet furious crisscrossing of lines in Cheng's large-scale paintings, slowly reveals its pattern to the viewer's eye. The lines depict schematized drapery generally from Chinese sources—fragments of scroll paintings and cave paintings gleaned from the pages of art history books. This web of lines stretches across the front most surface of the paintings as though to hold in place the more loosely painted and illusionistically rendered fragments of draperies taken from European Renaissance paintings. In this power struggle between East and West, who's on top is both significant and not. The fine network of lines of the Chinese draperies obstructs a clear reading of the trompe l'oeil Renaissance draperies beneath, yet is itself in danger of being swallowed by these same denser draperies. As in "Contested" (1995), there's often a wildness in the swirling of the gestural forms that is maintained within a strictly schematized and controlled bigger picture. Cheng combines the busting out quality of Abstract Expressionism with the carefully plotted control of Abstract Minimalism.

Cheng's paintings are carefully planned and plotted. Working from reproductions in art history books, Cheng makes small schematized drawings of single images on translucent paper then begins to mix and match them. By the time they've reached the large-scale painting size (in the 60" x 72" to 54" x 48" range), the images have undergone several translations. Cheng scales up her images manually rather than using a projector—as do many artists using the post-modern strategy of appropriation—because, as she says, without mechanical decisions, she "relives the image with her body."

The body is of central importance in her paintings, but typically, Cheng eliminates heads, legs, arms—in short, any body part that would stick out from the apparel. (However, so far in her prints, she has preserved the presence of the body.) She has done this, she says, to eliminate the explicit narrative content of the personages, preferring instead to arrive at a feeling of gesture and psychology from the draperies alone.

One is struck by the centralized placement of the major forms in her paintings. This central form is made up of layers of diverse and fragmentary images that coalesce, nonetheless, into coherent bodies. Though the actual bodies are absent, they leave in their stead the billowing costumes—as though the body fled quickly, stirring the air and leaving its warm imprint in the fabric. The elimination of any body clues, like facial expression, that could help us ascertain character and motivation, confounds our desire for a strict narrative and instead forces us to focus on the abstract forms.

Interestingly, though made up entirely of representations of outer apparel from diverse cultures and epochs, Cheng's paintings often conjure up the turbulent viscera of the inner (albeit absent) body. Digestion—the mixing and churning and breaking down of discrete entities is, in this case, like the contents of a giant multicultural blender in its early cycle—before all differences have been broken down into a smooth homogeneity. The fragments of the diverse original images are still large enough to maintain their identity while swirling with each other toward a melded oblivion. Titles are instructive here—"Interior Conditions" (1989/1995), "Co-mingle" (1995), and "Conversion" (1995) support this reading of the processes of digestion. "Contested" (1995) implies that the co-mingling of interior conditions may not be smooth and harmonious, but rather fraught with struggles, resistances, and incompatibilities. The painting "Shifting Fundamentals" (1989/1995) is particularly evocative of internal organs taken out of their protective context—excised from the body—creating a clearly centralized image on a nearly blank ground, as though surgically removed for purposes of study. The "fundamentals," in this case, are the conventions of pictorial representation from divergent cultures—Renaissance chiaroscuro and Chinese linear depictions of surface patterns. But each of these "fundamentals" has itself been modified and stylized by Cheng through her use of 20th century painting conventions. In the case of the modeled passages of Renaissance drapery, she uses conventions of Abstract Expressionism—i.e., a painterliness that calls attention to its "accidental" incidents: drips of turpentine-thinned paint, dripping over background and foreground shapes alike (eliminating any "real" spatial illusionism), wide gestural brush strokes, smudges and passages where paint appears rubbed off from the distressed surface. And for the Chinese draperies, she uses a deadpan drawing style made up of a line of uniform thickness, not gestural

but carefully plotted like the line in instructional manuals for mechanical devices that illustrates 3-dimensionality while at the same time flattening the object into pure pattern.

When choosing works to accompany this article as black and white reproductions, it was necessary to eliminate many of Cheng's images because the contrast between forms in those works was arrived at through the juxtaposition of different colors, rather than through the use of lights and darks. And when these works are translated into black and white, the forms, without the contrasting colors, are difficult or impossible to distinguish. As, for example, in "Ceremony" (1995) (not reproduced here) where the overlay of a luminous cobalt blue line sings along the painting in vibrant contrast to the orangish earth tones of the background forms. Lush color is important in Cheng's work. One can sense a deliberate experimentation in her use of the play achieved between unlikely color combinations. For example, the stormy mood of "Contested," with its somber, predominantly olive green and black background figures from a Han Dynasty tomb relief, is contrasted by an ambiguous background/ foreground passage of an achingly tender emerald green.

There's a game-like quality to the way the viewer's eye is invited to roam the mazes of these paintings. The eye seeks out the original singular image but can't help but be lured by shapes that are formed through the intersection of several disparate images. It's in the intervals and interstices that so much goes on in Cheng's paintings. This merging of disparate yet similar images creates tantalizing fractures and rifts that spur the viewer to reassemble, or mend the images but with the inevitability of re-piecing the parts "incorrectly." For the viewer, this experience approaches something like a painterly version of channel surfing—with its onslaught of nearly abstract figurative fragments snatched from their context of origin. For example, "Continuum" combines a stiff collar from a 17th century Spanish painting, a Byzantine Christ holding a book, and finally a Bodhisattva. But my eye keeps focusing on an amoebic shape slightly below and right of center that is created through the intersection of two humps of the collar and the central draping loop in Christ's lap.

Despite the orderly procedure Cheng uses to construct her paintings, there's a scribbly, tangled, furious quality to these works. The solidly rendered centralized figure that seems to represent a certain authority, or overbearing presence (a legacy of European Renaissance tradition—in its turn a legacy of Classical Greece), is as though scratched out and defaced with the barbed lace of the linear decorative line derived from the Chinese tradition. It seems a battle is raging between the weighty materiality of the solidly rendered forms and the field of linear energy that overlays it. A struggle between the mismatched forces of materiality and spirituality?

Perhaps. But that may only scratch the surface. For in a period when identity politics has informed so much contemporary art, Emily Cheng has devised a pictorially subtle yet fundamental way to bridge the rift between the complex and opposing forces of not only her own personal heritage but of the wider world of cultural dichotomies where one is used to hearing that East is East and West is West.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

"ALL MY VAST/ JOURNEYING SENSIBILITY": BARBARA GUEST'S RECENT WORK

Parts of this paper were delivered at the Festschrift for Guest held at Brown University in April 1994; Guest's books mentioned here are *Fair Realism* (Sun & Moon, 1989), *Selected Poems* (Sun & Moon Press, 1995), *Stripped Tales* (Kelsey St. Press, 1995), and *Quill Solitary Apparition* (Post-Apollo Press, 1996).

Crystal cabinets. A Jamesean enthusiasm for the nuance. A "poetess"—or, "a dollop is dolloping." It is significant to me that a woman poet, a figure often generically taxed with the easy and quasi-insulting term "poetess," returns to this very term, and makes hay of it. When she says of the poetess that "a dollop is dolloping" she chooses a silly, gleeful word—dollop means a large lump, helping or portion, and even suggests a slatternly woman, a trollop. Altogether de trop, the word (noun and verb) gallops and bounces up with "what natural c/o abnormal/ loquaciousness" to mock cliches of female literary activity, to accept, with a large-spirited tact, the minoritizing term, and make it major: "genial! as space." (SP 78) Not quite Ovid, not quite Sappho, but a polymorphic erotic atmosphere as if an extension and refinement of theirs. The fall of pattern and light. "All my vast/ journeying sensibility," favoring the discovery and creation of landscapes in which one could live an emotionally subtle, visually lush, attentive life. (FR 15) Travelling, travelling, yet neither homeless nor exilic; travelling in order "Mysteriously [to define] the Mysterious."

This talk, subtitled "Byzantine Proposals of Poetry," (1986) offers some insight into Barbara Guest's poetics.[1] Byzantium is certainly a reality (a real place seen on a real trip, offering real events to ponder) and a cultural metaphor—the Byzantine—or labyrinthine, intricate. In this essay, Guest narrates a primal scene of the construction of poetic meaning. Disembarking from a ship, already in a state of political/poetical excitement, she and her party enter a bazaar. "Before our eyes were laid golden, silken stuffs of such serious and sophisticated spinning and weaving only to be viewed in the expensive shops of the West. There they lay as if mute rags, palatial silks." The juxtaposed mute/palatial and rags/silks is suggestive if only because the opposite of *palatial* is offered as *mute*. Thus speaking and

wealthy sumptuousness are allied, as if access to a speaking subjectivity occurred through a sense of exotic luxury. Involved here are an economic-social narrative involving class and desire, purchase/ accumulation, the role of travel, translation of a thing into one's own world, imports, and appropriation, and an aesthetic narrative involving sensual pleasures, visual bliss, texture, sight, fairy tale gold.

Buying some of the silk, the visitors "sailed on with a memory of simple grandeur, as unlikely a mixture as could be found anywhere except in poetry." Poetry is allied with and motivated by a special kind of riches. But there is more. "The silk was turned into curtains and thus began to lead a tamed, domestic existence, its history asleep in our house, much as a poem enters into an anthology." This simple grandeur, with its aura of mystery, exists inside a domestic space which becomes flushed with its secret presence. This whole narrative of the passage of silk from an Asian bazaar to domestic possession is Guest's allegory of the feeling poetry provides.

Guest speaks for the silk, for the transformative passage or conduit, and for the final ("domestic") product. Guest wants the poet to work with a "secret life," find "abrupt connections with the remote," be a shape changer. The best poetry will be metamorphic in a particular direction—a silk that can be "respected" and which has "an ability to exchange its contour for a curtain without losing an identity imposed by the bartering of one idea for another." It is a way of saying that domestication (curtain-making from that exotic silk) may complicate beauty but does not reduce it. "Silk" itself makes interested choices in Guest's narrative, for, taking on a person-like agency and consciousness, it accepts merchant-bazaar-market value-display in order to also have or reveal "a Byzantine preference" for "hidden noise" and "mysterious deep." This is absolutely not a personal space (it "protects" and does not reveal the poet); yet at the same time Guest says "all poetry is confessional."[2] By this we are meant to see that poetry reveals essences of deep inner psychic processes, fantasies, needs, and fulfillments. In fact (and in a resistance to many kinds of dominant poetry), "the poet whose sole urgency is his subject matter neglects the immensity of the depth to be rendered by Art." Rather, "In the cloak of Byzantine colors the poet spins a secret life."

It's worth remembering, since the Mallarmean poetics of mystery, the exotic, "'not the thing, but its effect'" is not unusual, that Guest shows a particular investment in this poetics. The assertion of the exotic and mysterious as a realm of poetry is not naturalized, but is motivated whenever it occurs. Guest's particular affirmation is an interesting position for a woman poet to take, given the well-trodden ideological path between females and the exotic beauty of the collectable, given the linkage of females with the "Orient," and her bond with stuffs—texture, textile, material, veiling, and quasi-revealing. Guest speaks allusively of this

situation when she says "You can think of this 'something else' [of poetry] as a woman behind a veil."

Her cultural metaphor does have a tinge of "Orientalism," a fact which Guest herself notes—amusedly, evoking "corridors, plots, disguise, whispers". . .a "rather sinister, and almost indelicate movie-plot." The erotic, concealed mysteries of both the female and the Asian silk continue the motif of Orientalism. This feminized metaphor raises the question of gender in her poetry, to which I want meditatively to turn. Guest holds that the object of poetic desire, the mystery or poetry, the aura for this woman poet comes in the image of a veiled, mysterious female and foreign figure. Poetry must be made to continue the mystery, not puncture it. I have already indicated that this mystery coexists often with a free-floating amusement ("OH CHARMER"). (QSA) Another way this is accomplished is to allow traces of beauty and desire to be set forth in oblique allusion, by studied use of the genre of the fragment.

In the two most recent books *(Quill Solitary Apparition* and *Stripped Tales),* this aspect of her work is particularly developed. There are fairy tale queries and characters, especially female ones, set out in a "broderie" consisting of barely articulated vectors of plot, not full tales, and turns veiled by other turns: "In what casket the thimble:/ suggests a frail misdemeanor—/on the outer garment // (one never knows)." (QSA) The work seems to be an abstraction of *The Fairy Queen, The Rape of the Lock,* and neo-pre-Raphaelite treatments of women, but all done in a way that fuses solemnity with a vampish and mischievous sprightliness. In Guest's work in these books, a girl is scampering in and out of a variety of desirous "gazes"—the male gaze (often a knight or such like), the female gaze, and in some sense, her own gaze: "The lady protests she reserves the right to select her own ghost." (ST 38) Or: "herself the coronet/ being gleamy." (QSA) The oblique manner of these recent works suggests the arabesque or curlicue, a design motif that is thoroughly, frankly decorative. The frank interest in joyously absorbing and proposing elements of the feminine in a female voice links her work to Kathleen Fraser's and Lyn Hejinian's.

Another way that gender is negotiated in Guest's poetry is through this "Byzantine" narrative of silks and the exotic, which alludes to the female place in Western imaginations and to the feminine without being totally captured by it. This Byzantium is compounded of voyages, strangers, and Keatsean "golden, silken stuffs," French symbolist "invitations to voyages." Once one has travelled in realms of gold, one finds the arresting possibility that poetry can be gently "domesticated" without losing its underside—its "secret life," that "inner sound . . . which protects the poet." In this world of mystery, poems are the summary or essence or registered impact of "that which is convoluted, difficult to track down, complicated. Underneath its apparent surface there is the presence of 'something else.'" Guest adduces

Keats, Mallarmé, Dickinson, and Shelley and Marianne Moore as those capable of rendering this "aura" of the special world called poetry. All of these are poets who exercise a profound kind of effacement of personality in favor of an entrance into another site than the ego. Some are poets who favor romantic transcendence, who move into the sublime.

In Guest's poetic universe, actual narrative and context are irritant sources of stress and tension.[3] The poem is, instead, a privileged site or means or institution by which these stresses are transformed. One sees this clearly in the title "stripped tales," both stripped down and offering the striped lattice of a shutter, so one can see only selected bits of what is "happening." Materials generated inside various contexts (social,, lived, biographical) "transcend their own context" in order to come to new relationships and new patterns inside the poem. The poem then becomes a world unto itself, a willful translation which barely checks with the original, but seeks instead to assert its language flair, adding a supplement of the exotic and a shrug for the forever unrenderable "content." In this way "a narrative"—the suggestion is a specific incident and its claims—"diffuses" into images, and thence into "lyric arrangements."[4] One sees this especially in a climactic title of her later career, the book *Fair Realism*. Poetry occurs by an act of transformative translation, a meditating over "realism" (for the very word is redolent of novels, of narratives) until it becomes "fair"—the word means beautiful, clear, and sunny, but it also re-evokes the "fair," or bazaar (of Guest's allegory of poetry) in which the secret aura inside things is discovered through silk—a Byzantine product, mysterious and full of grandeur. And as well, evokes the "fair"—as in women, the fair sex.

The business of a speaker being in at least two or three places at once, speaking from the vectors of a site, and not from a voice or an (one) identity is typical of her poetry. Some of the multiple, even contradictory, positions are stated in the following stanza from *Fair Realism;* the use of the pronoun "I" makes the shifts easier to follow—engagement, disengagement; participation-observation; agency-passivity; decision-randomness; self-other; picture-story.

> I float over this dwelling and when I choose
> enter it. I have an ethnological interest
> in this building, because I inhabit it
> and upon me has been bestowed the decision of changing
> an abstract picture of light into a ghost-like story
> of a prince whose principality I now share,
> into whose confidence I have wandered.
>
> (FR 8)

This multiple positionality of a wayward creature named "I" is articulated quite directly by Guest in her essay "Shifting Persona" in *Poetics Journal*.[5] "The person inside a literary creation can be both viewer and insider." Guest proposes a gestalt notion of being whole and part, being in multiple places, at once inside and around and outside the site of the poem. It is as if she were host and guest at once.

This guest-host relation gives us access to a recurrent cultural narrative of gender configurations in Guest's work: male painters, in relation to female models, muses, and helper figures, male painters like Miró, painting a work called "The Poetess," Picasso in relation to Dora Maar.[6] Guest approaches these materials in the spirit of shifting personae, with multiple identifications at work: sited as model and painter, as Picasso and Maar, and as the third term viewing them, identifying with both, and with their painful, generative symbiosis.

In "The Nude," a male painter regards a female model. She seems the very embodiment, to him, of "shadow" (FR 57), she has strong therapeutic significance, of "holding" in object-relations terms. "The narcissism of the artist escapes into a body/ that defines his emotions, // An interior where his own contour is less misty." (FR 58) Here the model is a boundary, or a limit term for something otherwise infantile and chaotic. The importance and powerful agency of this nude increases yet again in Guest's depiction: the model in a clear allusion to the book's title, has "realism." She is judicious, forcefully linked to her own situatedness, her own "realism" in her own life despite the (again tenderly banal) depictions of traditional claptrap around models.

> A severe distance is established between her realism and his anxious attempt to define it.
>
> The painter desires the image he has selected to be clothed in the absolute silk of his touch,
>
> Lonely himself he has admired the glance of kimonos, mirrors, fans and bestowed them on her. . .
>
> (FR 58-59)

[and later]

> He searches the world to find those spheres that will confine the fluid nude. . .
>
> (FR 60)

When the nude sees the painting, "she asks, where am I?" Finding that "he has not drawn her," she takes power over the moment. (FR 63) "She turns herself into a star/ above the unattended foliage,/ He views her as she glistens, silver enters the picture." (FR 63) The roles of model/painter linked by banal binary gender narratives to the terms passive/active can no longer be sustained as given. The model self-metamorphoses, takes agency.

The transformation narrated in Guest's poem is especially marked in relation to the artwork which it accompanies in its original publication. Warren Brandt's work plays with nudes from the history of art.[7] He mimics, or alludes to the Olympia by Manet, to nudes by Gauguin, Picasso, Fragonard, Rodin and many more. He plays with varying media and techniques for his history of art including watercolor, drypoint, charcoal sketch, pencil, pen, oil, photo, and makes allusions to different modes of production of the nude woman (such as nineteenth-century pornography). As Guest says "The artist borrows mannerisms and technique" (FR 60) and "each day there is a different voice." (FR 62) Brandt is basically making the history of the depiction of the female nude be a metaphor for the history of art as a whole. When the poem is put next to the artworks and read inside the book to which Guest has contributed, the poem seems quietly critical of gender binarism. It at least tries to rectify the power balance, the eroticisms and agencies in the artworks Brandt has made.

In Guest's poem, the model's changes, including consciously willed changes, transform the painter's picture and his palette. She "leads" him. He interprets her. The relationship is symbiotic. But both figures are powerful. Despite the nude's own narcissism familiar from pictorial and literary tradition and re-presented by Brandt ("She was either admiring herself or bathing," FR 62), Guest's nude moves into the fearful, the unknown, and the threatening with aplomb: "She reaches for ombre, noir/ 'It is the narrowness of time.'" (FR 64) The nude is not solely or only the object of a fixing gaze, although the poem knows that it would be naive and untrue to the history of art to posit that she is never so. Thus, she is also, at the same time, the object of a fixing gaze and the subject meditating herself. Both positions are discussed within the poem. So too the painter inside the poem has at least a double position; he has the power of sight, of skill, of desire, of address. But sometimes he is blind or veiled in his understanding.

Further, with an uncanny negative capability, Guest depicts shifts between both the male painter and the female nude. They are both herself, shifting personae in their bond, which is (as in Wordsworth and Stevens) spousal. The viewed and viewer of art, the model-painter present a shifting but articulate symbiosis, one peculiarly formative and satisfying (in the sense that Stevens also understood) by proposing some recurrent dialogue, endless, perpetually knitted up and unraveled, between reality and the

imagination. Most viewers outside the work of art (in other words, us) are usually asked by "art" to be inside the painter's eye. So the normal institutions of viewing further frame and contain the nude. Guest's poem is critical because it gives us another place from which to see. Rather than seeing only the nude via the painter's eye, Guest's poem makes us see the space and symbiosis between painter and model. She is working the in-between. This dialogue and give-and-take, this unstable synthesis of the two players is one interpretation of what Guest means by "fair realism." "Fair" means justice has been served: it is a "just" realism, because it does justice to both parts of the relationship.

These gender materials also occur, with drama and pathos, in the poem "Dora Maar." Because Maar was an actual person, one of Picasso's fraught loves, Guest raises the issue of appropriation and gender in the case when "her tears benefit his painting" and her zaniness and visions are actualized through his work. (FR 23) "Dora Maar" is a poem in six parts, perhaps an allusion to a series of six progressively more abstracting paintings which Picasso did of Maar. Maar, like so many of the women one now knows only as ancilla to male masters, had at one point a serious career. She was a photographer and painter, described by one critic as a "bluestocking," always a term of fascinated resistance to strong-minded women. She met Picasso in 1935 or 1936, apparently in a surrealist incident very like Guest's stanza summary: "In a cafe he watched her throw the knife/ between the fingers of a gloved hand. . ." (FR 23). Commentators point to Maar's intelligence and autonomy as unique to Picasso's women (Richardson: "Dora was a formidable muse"), but her fierce moods and mental instability link her to several other of Picasso's love-choices. One critic uses, for Maar, the clinical term "borderline personality."[8]

Maar was important for her ties to surrealism and to the poet Eluard, and thereby to a more politicized modernism than had, to date, distinguished Picasso. John Richardson argues that with each new mistress, Picasso shifted painting style; Mary Mathews Gedo makes the corresponding argument that these shifts are linked not only to new women but to serious and productive male friends. The Maar/ Eluard combination was especially potent. There is strong speculation that her and Eluard's left politics influenced Picasso in his support of the Spanish Republic. As is well known, a mural by Picasso had already been commissioned for the Republican Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition of Arts and Sciences; after the bombing of Guernica on April 26, 1937, he took the commission as an occasion for a major protest. Maar documented the remarkably quick evolution and realization of the mural *Guernica* in a series of photographs, and, apparently, helped the quick realization by painting the side of the horse.

There are allusions by Guest to Maar's double position in relationship to the mural *Guernica:* first, as muse-inspiration—*"she was that woman holding a light"* and "She was the woman who fell from the house/ in the daylight bombing," (FR 23) and second, as artist-photographer *"She photographed the hysterical success/* stage by stage with her alphabet of sighs. . ." (FR 24)[9] Guest represents the muse figure positively yet ruefully, and so too the male artist, whose energy and drive have a magical quality.

The relationship of woman to male master is lucidly articulated: "her tears benefit his painting" Guest says. *"He raids her hallucinatory bicycle for an object/ he calls 'found' as the handles and bicycle seat/ are transformed—* "(FR 24) But "found" is a term of erasure, by a randomizing of his access to the image; it denies indebtedness. This account in the poem is, in any event, quasifactual; Guest depicts how Maar's imagination and her instabilities spur Picasso. She shows a painter whose imagination is sometimes banal and needs to be jump-started by the nervous energy and surreal vivacity of this woman (among many others in his career). Guest represents a symbiotic relationship in which the female seems to have imagination and vision to spare, yet the male artist has the career.

She shows that the male artist operates with a mythically sanctioned lèse-majesté: "Eclectic and careless like Jove when changed/ into a bull he finds the classical/ screams of maidens exciting. . ." (FR 24) Guest depicts a male-female relation in which the painter is able to give back to the model-muse the gift of her own vision, which she describes as an enchanting experience for Maar: "once he had drawn her torso with wings/ afterwards she saw the river/ with a translucent depth/ when her arm was a wing." (FR 24) Or—shifting again—is it that Picasso has "raided" her vision and constructed works in which "her appearance is meddled with. . ." (FR 24) Sometimes the female's emotions, dreams, and body are a kind of raw material, the straw, that Picasso spins into gold. But sometimes the transformative powers of Maar are described as preceding Picasso's painting, as if she preferred a new reality, one which Picasso did not invent, but belatedly records: "her noble forehead is a sand cap water deftly clears,/ one of her eyes is red, the other blue like a portrait of Marie-Thérèse though bolder. . . ." (FR 23, Marie-Thérèse is another mistress of Picasso) Are the terms appropriation? metamorphosis? Are there other terms? Can we balance the conflictual claims which these terms make?

The female figure's waywardness and uncontainability are a trope for the unchained imagination, the excessive space which she fully and consciously inhabits. If the female figure exists in a kind of feminine space familiar from post-structuralism, the agency and bite of this figure in Guest's depiction belie the culturally familiar "feminine" of pre-thetic, pre-articulate Otherness. In Guest this muse has been invested with a force and deliberateness that undermine more familiar postulates of passivity and

unconsciousness. Despite having gendered protagonists, and in the case of Maar and Picasso having chosen to write about a historically documented interaction, Guest works to neutralize either-or gender assumptions and moralized assessments by her both, and, and, and elaborations. Further, she balances the claims of both painter and muse by staging their encounter in the work of a female poet (herself). The female poet becomes the place in which the gender materials of culture can be examined in their mystery and impact.

Of course, as with any work, Guest's poem diverges here from certain data, and interprets the situation with certain materials selected, others undivulged or unavailable for consideration. I offer some melodramatic ones. In his memoir, James Lord recounts saying to Maar that she'll never be forgotten because Picasso has painted her so often. Thereupon, according to Lord, she replied: "Do you think I care? Does Mme. Cézanne care? Does Saskia Rembrandt care? Remember that I, too, am an artist."[10] Maar's articulate, angry riposte comes, alas, to almost nothing; she is an artist in the structural position of Cézanne's apple. Her reply also suggests the blustering gestures of a King Canute trying to stop the waves of Picasso's overwhelming position in modernism. And trying to stop the pressures of critical consumption bent on dissolving, erasing, and burying the work of any female figures in modernism, good, bad, or indifferent. Picasso himself contributed to this climate with such opinions as "No worse than any other woman painter" about the watercolors of Ferdnande Olivier, his first mistress. (Richardson in McCully, 278) Or when he grafted a dog's face onto Maar's, and stated with Aristotelian flair, that he had thereby made a comment "on the animal nature of woman." (Richardson in McCully, 283)

When Picasso left Maar, she suffered a collapse. She then briefly had therapy with Lacan, that master of the feminine space of Otherness with its final, uncompromising lacks: doomed to represent or symbolize the elusive Phallus (logos-power) for Phallus-seeking males with their (definitional) similacrum of such power (alias, the penis). After, she became a recluse. This may be a tendentious way of putting things, but it is suggestive.

The way Guest depicts the model-painter and Maar-Picasso relationships interprets them in a way to equalize them, to make them an allegory of a gendered relationship between imagined-realism ("fair realism") and the artist, a drama that is engaged whenever art is made. Guest is talking about a kind of spousal event, a symbiosis, a fittedness of one to the other. To some degree this is a compensatory interpretation, one whose function in the work of a female writer might be the subject of further analysis and debate. Yet Guest also tries to unsettle this platonic world of spousal verse, by calling attention to the problematic of Maar. This too is an act of "fair realism"—to be fair to what really is, and it rectifies a generally androcentric

art historical record. In Guest's poem, Maar escapes her function for Picasso, and/but she is also destroyed by it. How can both these things be? Guest does not attribute anger or resistance to Maar at the end of the poem, but rather produces an elegiac, bucolic aftermath. Guest's Maar lives in her farmhouse, a gift from Picasso. "Sweetness returns to her scorched tongue . . ." and "Grief is banished from her coveted roost." (FR 25)

Notes

1 "Mysteriously Defining the Mysterious: Byzantine Proposals of Poetry" at the St. Marks Poetry Project, and published in part in *HOW(ever)* in October 1986 (III.3): 12–13.

2 "Barbara Guest: An Interview by Mark Hillringhouse," *American Poetry Review* 21, 4 (July/August 1992): 23–30; citations on 23.

3 In another brief paragraph in another *HOW(ever)* I, 3 (February 1984): 7, heading up a selection from "The Türler Losses."

4 *HOW(ever)* I, 3 (February 1984): 7.

5 The very title is indicative of the singularity splitting into plurality and back; one could expect "shifting personae" in the plural. *Poetics Journal* 9 (June 1991): 85-88.

6 This situation recurs in *Fair Realism* in the long poem called "The Nude" (57–64, a poem in which indebtedness to Stevens seems open) and in the poem "The Cradle of Culture" (76-77) in which the artist Miró draws a work called "The Poetess." "The Cradle of Culture" alludes to an earlier poem by Guest, a self-referential work called "The Poetess" [after Miró's painting of that name] which appeared in *Moscow Mansions* (1973, 46) about twenty years earlier.

7 Warren Brandt, *Nudes*, New York: The Arts Publisher, 1986. We know the artist for Brandt is male since he is depicted as such in a few of these works.

8 Mary Mathews Gedo, *Picasso: Art as Autobiography*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, 286.

9 John Richardson, "Picasso: a retrospective view" comments at length. Guernica "is permeated by Dora's presence. She not only photographed it at different stages of completion, but she actually painted part of it, and the figure holding a lamp is unquestionably a likeness of Dora. (So far as I know, nobody has published the fact that Dora Maar worked on Guernica. Many of the vertical strokes on the horse's body were painted by her.) Moreover, she was an important link with Surrealists like Eluard who supported the Popular Front against Franco and whose ideas may well have played a part in the gestation of Guernica." Originally published in 1980, included in *A Picasso Anthology: Documents, Criticism, Reminiscences*, ed. Marilyn McCully, Princeton UP 1982, 281-82.

10 James Lord, *Picasso and Dora: A Personal Memoir*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993, 123. The other two women mentioned were notable models for their husbands' paintings.

HEATHER RAMSDALE

CLOSET I

I thought I'd say some more about the closet. The closet—my god, the closet is a tangle of sleeves, I could go in but even dreams avoid it. And something is bound to come from that. Some of the shit stacked up in there. Some of the shit stuffed in—I could go on.

I could just go but everything I need I have right here, this [a spoon] and I have this [dress] and here [it's a brick] to show you holding the brick to show you letting go of the brick in a way that is fast, is red or silver, what brick is silver—there is no time now: would you like me to scare you! To show you everything!

For a moment almost forgetting about the closet they emerge from in pilgrim shirts, touching

their own, yanking their
own liver out.

Shirts go in. Shirts come out. Shirts, do not move.

And now I am quite satisfied with myself.

From this box from which I am speaking to you, I am directing you to the left, I am saying, "In." Though I have not been there myself. I must know something like the sensation where you stand.

Are you standing? Are you standing on his softest throat? Are you in his clothing? So he is very close and sees you. Are you liking pulling out his cutting his hair off closing his opening the cavity—are you there, are you standing there?

From which place the whole horizon I see, including descriptive facts and perceptions of the areas most haunting. Including something moving in frequent returns to take on the form of mice rats bald rat tails. Including

string rope wire moving at the outer edge of vision, gnawed red packaging bright price tags red rags for windows to wipe the window with to make it clean—

From which place the whole horizon, no footprints leading in, leading out, no center to move out from. From the edge of vision, distances fall equally away, cannot be measured, not reached by foot. By way of reason, to take a stab in the dark—dense, dull as dry clay, hard as common brick, a wall of bricks impenetrable in the common sense, as this is the last part of the house. Beyond; strange music, crowds cheering, crowds breathing, crouching close to the ground to grab a brick to hurl back into the crowd rushing toward a common end

brutally, he said in a reasonable way. It was very clear, what we did to each other was horrible.

I am speaking only for myself. I wasn't there. I've lost some possibility, some range. Each time I opened my mouth it was already public, something had happened to it, like blood leaving a wound, I am speaking only for myself.

Last drops fall from the box I've made a nest and map from. File: file "M." There, I almost said it. There is no such place. I forget and then remember.

RON PADGETT

FOUR POEMS

INTERIOR DECORATION

Parts were missing
and you had to figure out not only
what parts but in what order
the remaining parts should be arranged
to make a perfect tense
slide imperceptibly up into the present
like a fish that has swum up alongside your snorkel
and seems to be gasping for air. If
only fish had learned to have legs
like Betty Grable's, each one insured
for one million dollars, though if she'd have lost one
the other wouldn't be worth very much,
except to her, of course. What if both of her legs had
come off and started spinning around in the sky?
What kind of a dumb question is that?
There is no answer. Or rather,
the answer has been rearranged.

MARIANA

The young Albanian girl in a green summer dress,
her face a little on the heavy side and her head
tilted as if from a weight she feels inside, a weight
that could never find the right subtitle,
has paused because a man
has made a funny face and now he clicks
before her face goes back, he clicks as if
to say, "Look, here's another you, your dress
so pretty and bright" even though it's plain,
like the girl, who knows it, and smiles.

FROM HUNGER

Ten til twelve,
almost time for the lunch
I decided I'd have at noon,
hungry or not,
because the idea of eating
appealed to me and I needed
a specific time to eat.
Now it's six til.
I feel as though I have
just eaten a little bite,
an hors d'oeuvre. That
was a bad expression
to take from the French:
hors d'oeuvre. No one can
spell it and few can say it,

and when you think of its
literal translation ("outside
the work") it makes you want
to join a highway paving crew.
Four minutes to go. The smell
of hot asphalt has lodged
itself deep in my nostrils
and all I can think of is
a black lunchpail with something
wrapped in wax paper and baloneyesque.
Now just two. Outside, a bluejay
is laughing at me.
Suddenly I feel very hungry.

WALKING AND TALKING

Why don't I write about Kenward and Patty
who as I opened the front door and cracked the screen
on my way out were walking away from the house
as if they had just been here, Patty talking and Kenward
saying uh-hunh every eight or ten steps. I didn't
want to write about them, the same way I didn't
want to interrupt their morning walk that had taken them
through the woods and out and back up toward Kenward's.
I want them to have that world to themselves
as I have this one (words in my head).

MARTA PETREU

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the Romanian
by Adam J. Sorkin
and Liviu Bleoca)

THE SEEING EYE

Who can keep carrying his own consciousness like some sort of
[doubtful pregnancy?

The utopia of being happy by any means (what ardor!)
And love oh "the most natural relationship between two human
[beings"
wrote Marx
So many sentiments find their way to hell
Biography—a history drowned in blood like a global massacre

We don't have a banner for every sorrow— that I admit

And who can stand self-awareness?
closed behind eyelids the eye sees
the red arterial fountains the lofty saline jet
yes the nocturnal rainbow
of the surgically severed external carotid
in sea caves clouded with brown seaweed
the young dead display a black plumage:
as if through rotten hemp
their nerves show forth
in the tide-gnawed flesh

Hell is a keenly seeing eye

Oh! who can endure it?
Who today piece by piece
is skinning
the young dead?

HUNTING IN THE SNOW

Father, I say:

my men—the living and the dead—hunt me

the living and the dead surround me
they sniff my black armpits my insomnia my weeping
Listen carefully to me:
today (today only) I'm the prize game
the flesh painted with wild poppies
today I'm the trophy in a collar paraded throughout the world
[with great pomp

Yes. Under my skin I wear
a polar winter immense violet snowflakes
Under my skin I wear a snowfall infinitely divisible like amoebas
[in rut
Ah. Self-fear. The worn-out skin tight like a shirt of chain mail
Under my epidermis I wear my memory the carbon black the
[eternal slime
Yes, I wear myself under my skin

and I say to myself: there's no point there's no point there's no
[point
There's no point to loving them: they crush the wild honey out
[of the new honeycombs
they suck the warm bloody marrow from the bone
they babble swallow snarl sleep
Who knows how to resist?
Behold. They gouge the skin cut the wild beast's mane gorge on
[the flesh to the bone
("I love you," I've been told. It might be true—I suppose.
But self-fear ah fear that unique identity of mine remains there
forevermore within me)

Father
I'm your still living body
And I dwell dead center in the target
They: your hunters in the snow
meat-eaters on this fast-day
your beaters your crack shots

Disguised in a bride's chemise my body inhabits the heart of the
[circle

I'm not in love: I don't love them they don't love me
I want to hide

Pay heed. This famished pack has driven me back inside myself
[again
my knees drawn up to my chin I await them
I lie. I lie to myself that it's I who am the hunter
not the winter trophy the honey sleeping in the honeycombs the
[flesh
blooming into huge wild poppies indecent like a man's severed
[head
I fantasize that I'm the hunter
not the delicate neck adorned with a studded choker

My insomnia is the snow dazzling in the sun
cracked and tight a scaly skin—my memory

a shirt of mail

Yes. Oxidized metal worn on the flesh directly under my skin
Father: the living and the dead hunt me
This I know: my body will betray me

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MICHEL DEGUY

POETICS AND A POEM

(Tr. from the French
by Wilson Baldridge)

PROPOSITIONS FOR AN *ARS POETICA*

I owe you the truth in poems.

The poem is made up of sequences where image, figure, rhythm are undivided. One must enter indivision.

The image is not icon, nor semiosis; but "likening," thing of things.

The poem is in the figure, rather than the figure in the poem.

The characteristic of "modernity" is that of the figure's generalization.

The poem, swinging like a door that invents a threshold, fluctuates between two states of rhythm: from prose poems to prose in poems.

Listen and see! What does he see? *Opsis tôn adêlon ta phainoména* (Anaxagoras): the point whence a *phenomenon* appears offering a *view* onto things *not patent*. Or: what appears offers a (quasi) view onto what does not stand out openly. They exchange positions through likening, wherein they testify.

The manifest shows us the hidden; "that's how it is."

The operation implies a reversal. From the testified which it is, the hidden becomes the testifier; the manifest finds meaning in being like it. Parabolically; *ana*-logically.

What shows up "by itself? Nothing; nothing is obvious on its own. One would say rather that everything is shown by another, *with* its others, with what-it's-like.

So, in passing, poetry is not alone; but dancing-with, in the round of the muses.

Always and anyway poetry drops you a reference.

Relating, referring, conferring, transferring, it is of the circumstance; it opens here another over-there than that one.

A principle of comparison federates all figures. The one is not the other; the one is like the other. Poetic attention tries to speak the comm-unity of mortals.

The poem makes us propositions—logically, erotically. "a *or* b": *or* is a pivot, as *like* is. Thus the offering of a possibility opens up, without date of foreclosure; and the poem itself is an "expan-si-on of infinite things" (Baudelaire)—an extension of possibility upon "the world."

To-be-like was an injunction too. "Be ye as children!" (Why "children"?) Whereby to be like them, the carefree . . . we must try to understand, calling back in question the priority of(violent) *mimêsis* and of (preontological) *Sorge*. The Gospel is a parable made of be-likes. It elects its testifiers straight off *a* world, from what is at once familiar and raisable (ana-logy) as a sign (of contradiction); around the *like* then, a pivot, the reversal can begin to operate, which in return clarifies nearness by remoteness, *clarum* by *obscurius*, *rationale* by *revelatum*, one "kingdom" by another; an exchange of the values of testifier and testified: reciprocal clarification. Upon this model also is articulated the lived circumstance's relation to citation

The poetic indicative, a definition rather than an injunction, is not the religious imperative. (Re)semblance is not a matter of opinion. Contrary to what one believes sometimes among family, where one discusses, and disputes, family likenesses. there is an objectivity of *family likenesses* and of *families of likeness*.

How to make revelation out of profanation after having made profanation out of revelation. "Revelation" is revelation *of* revelation: or of the revealability of the experience in figures or metamorphoses: it is anthropomorphosis continued by other means.

"A willing suspension of belief". . . Relate the unbelievable to the indelible. It is about undeleting the become-unbelievable.

Upon nothingness, "paternity of the void," we dance. *Ex nihilo* would be therefore the name of a publishing house.

Paralyzed omnipotence, my limitation as subject lays out the no-thru-streets. Paradox is what makes dead ends communicate with each other. The close apposition of oxymoronic contraries, similar to the assault phase of a struggle between flying buttresses, possesses an exhilarating force: rebounding against the catastrophe of the oxymoronic collision, the Lichtenbergian aphorism (definition, and not description) gives off fumes of humor and provokes an outburst that does not knock you down but encourages and leads thought one step further into the void.

In the end, it is a question of proportioning (Pascal): what to what through what? "My life," to *its* nothingness, through the work.

Why the *work?* The work-structure is quadruple. Microcosmic artifact, testifier for the whole *(parametron pantôn;* Protagoras). A part gives onto the whole which gives the part. A world is necessary to make WHOLENESS—through the work: the man of art represents the symbolic relation to the "world" through some figuration of our local relation to the earth. The land is "promised," if we maintain the relation of the promise, where the land is figured, to the land which supplies its own figurants.

The work is a labyrinth, whence one exits where one entered. The becoming-a-labyrinth (Kafka), or the passage as *Passagenwerk* (W. Benjamin), is what transforms the relation of inside to outside.

There must be an inside within to make insides. For there to be an inside, and hence an exit to the outside, there must be an inside of the inside: "set in abyss"; in the form of which the work is constructed.

A work is about a legacy, or a "grand testament" (Villon). Artists transmit their version of "the end of the world" (Baudelaire): *sublime* operation (Longinus) to dissemble the disappointment of a promise in the letter of a fable whose *spirit* the heirs reinvent.

The misery of our present is the shortage of legatees for the gift. The *cultural* price attached to works, become the "market" price, makes for a literality without enigma.

"Resistance to the present" (Deleuze) will be therefore the penultimate proposition—Is it "dead"? asks Mallarmé. The spirit of resistance is a spirit of benevolence which clears the way for a *sally* after Don Quixote.

For whom does one write? Not for one's ethnic group nor one's clan. But for all AND for none (Nietzsche).

(from *At Rush Hours)*

THALES' THEOREM, OR: ON THE THRESHOLD OF IMMENSITY

Thales could pass for the master of "likening," patron of artists: bringing back to earth a measurable diminutive of the immense distance (incommensurable in an initial sense) from the observer to a remote ship, at sea for example; or to the moon (or even the sun itself); this selfsame distance figuring *infinite* remoteness.

However it's not about measuring, in Thales' brilliant manner, what is there, an "existent," steep but not inaccessible, rather approachable,* such as the Pyramid—even less in that its height is known! But building it. Nor even measuring the distance from a boat to the coast—as it's not incommensurable: there's difficulty, but not impossibility; said distance is in liquid remoteness.

But raising a sundial, a tower, a Babel, a seamark, a diminutive *threshold of immensity*—every tower, every monument, would be Babelian inasmuch as essential incompleteness *within* completion, by the way it *falls short* of the infinite.

The maker *(poiêtês)* does not start from what is already given to measure its height; but the other way around, more *ana*logically, to give impetus, from an *ana* that launches the logos. The analogy takes off, lovely as the hypotenuse.

It's about *figuring;* the end is not the work, but the figure's relation to *that* which is figured; the work produces the obsession with what it's measured against, with the reference which comes to reside there and which, just as sense is not *in* any of the meaning's words, is not *in* the work. The secret to which the work proportions itself is not *in* it while not being elsewhere than in the work's world.

Now the Tower, a threshold of immensity, made to enter into a relation of figuration with the "diminutive infinite," is only a monster, a "Babel," for being isolated as Breughel shows it. In fact a work is at work with others, in the diversity of the city, which is not the work of one person alone, nor even of one generation, with and among things that are works and things that aren't works, and that one calls natural. So it's a rare, specific procedure which consists in *isolating* the tower, unpeopling the area to increase the "absurdity," the negative-fascinated relation to infinity, to X; such as Piero's city without a living soul, or Brasilia, or Frederick II's octagonal castle, or *The Tartars' Desert*. . .But the real Tower, the work, regroups, composes, unto itself, around itself, its confines, its proximity; co-figures the surroundings, makes a diversity of figures, of signs, exist; which can then make

enigmatic immanence abound, "among us," and address to the unfigurable, to the "unrepresentable," the attestive value of the *figurants* made.

* To draw near the inaccessible would be the phrase (if the boat at sea figures here *de facto* inaccessibility).

(from *Poetry Is Not Alone)*

FUJI

A fixed fringed cloud
suspends half of the sky

It's everywhere neither near, nor absent
Remote, it raises the horizon, airs the middle of the sky. It's everywhere, neither inaccessible nor approachable. Often veiled, mantilla'd with boughs, with wild azaleas, with outlined bonsai
It's well surrounded, enthroned. Lakes, roads make up the see, the way around, it's the sky's throne. Omnipresent Fuji, *mêtiêta* like the Zeus of our schooling, higher than the Ventoux, than the Olympus of our youth
Hung in mid-sky, closer, younger moon. . .
Long ago with Godo we'd have made a trek, an offering to the beard of the sky, a signal toward the sacred ascertained

It's what's at the center
No longer I nor thou the I
I consider it as of yet unsaid

(from *At Rush Hours)*

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

from ȮNȮME

Jer ȯn ȯme. The police will say. Just tell us your name. Just tell us you have one. I do. I have one timebeen summoned, but I do not will to summon them. Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. They come. They come when they won—to do it, to do the fistmele, the alliance, the alliance o.k., to be given a sign, at will, that once, to come, will say, after you, sir, how have you beaten. I have one timebeen. Taciturn. Seen. Do not make one taciturn madden. Do not fistgrip. Do not fistgrip on sovereign mores. Assume to be taken—moreover. "Assume" this means to take over and cover and cover the window from the instinct for looking and call many more big twosomes on for protection. Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. They are not so polite, but police in private. They do not sound this right, this kind, this measure of protection—taken, moreover. It is the alliance. They have one. They have it all coming to them. Why do they have it all coming to them? Do not listen, then. Do not listen because they have the big numbers, how can you trust the ones with big numbers, how can you trust too many bodies coming numb in their incense or too many dancers under virtual lanterns glowing off curtains to know any better. To tell on me. I have seen them do tell on me I have seen them do not know any better and then read from a text that says they do: witness: like a fistnote. They do witness like a fistnote but are too much mistaken when they have too much to say—and they say: "there-on—the roof"—*there is* a tenant on the roof and he is not being repentant. For you. On the knees. Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. If only they knew (Levinas said it) *there is: a rustling — a menace*. There is a rustling gravel on the roof bed but they are on the real bed *viséing* I have seen them do it *fistgripped on the knees* and when the blinds do the *viséing* by the real bed from the gravel bed I have looked on a mist, *omamist*, and I'm amiss to have looked on the wetting of the blinds with mist they are covered, if only they knew they do have no cover vis-à-vis the *viséing*, vis-à-vis the visage, it's either me or no me, vis-à-vis the visitor come on to their kisses, on the knees, to me, they should not throw kisses *fistgripped on the knees*, they should not do it to *the most heavy*

atmosphere belonging to no one, if only they knew, they would not come to the blinds with conclusions to tell on me and draw on the sovereign mores one more inference composite picture from their vision. On the knees. There are many visions (Levinas has one). Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. If you will believe me. Do not hang one for the instinct of looking. Do not hang one on the word of their vision. Do not hang one for the vision to be true in the lens I saw I have one timebeen seen through *tremble.* They should not draw from me such *tremble.* They should not claim the ground of conviction. I have seen them claim it and—in the ribs, on the knees. How have you beaten. I have one. Timebeen. Please. Jer ȯn ȯme. I am human, with conviction. Don't make me a ground of conviction if there is somesuch doubt in your human charge and sources. Calumny. It is calumny. What do they tell on me, if it is calumny? Look at me. Don't let them be locked. Don't let them be locked into the story when the *language itself can turn to rumour.* On me. Has one. Timebeen. *Omamist.* . . Jer ȯn ȯme. It is said, I have heard: today is the fifth: we are all equal before the law: I was told so—people think—what people will say—not to care what people say. If you will believe me. Jer ȯn ȯme. *Omamist.* It is said, I have heard: if a man is standing (just tell us your name), if a man is seized (just tell us you have one), if a man is seized by what he has seen, *viséing , fistgripped on the knees,* then (I have one timebeen). Seen. Jer ȯn ȯme. If you will believe me, then: a man does no harm *(I have done no harm)* "and. . .will be killed *'because he knows.'"* (Jerome said it)

PAUL CELAN

(Tr. from the German
by Catherine Reynolds)

OFF THE SINKING WHALEBROW
I read you—
you recognize me,

the sky
hurls itself
at the harpoon,

six-legged
our star cowers in the foam,

slowly
one who see this, hoists
the comfortmorsel:
Nothing
calling for its mate.

GARRETT KALLEBERG

THE LAST SEVEN

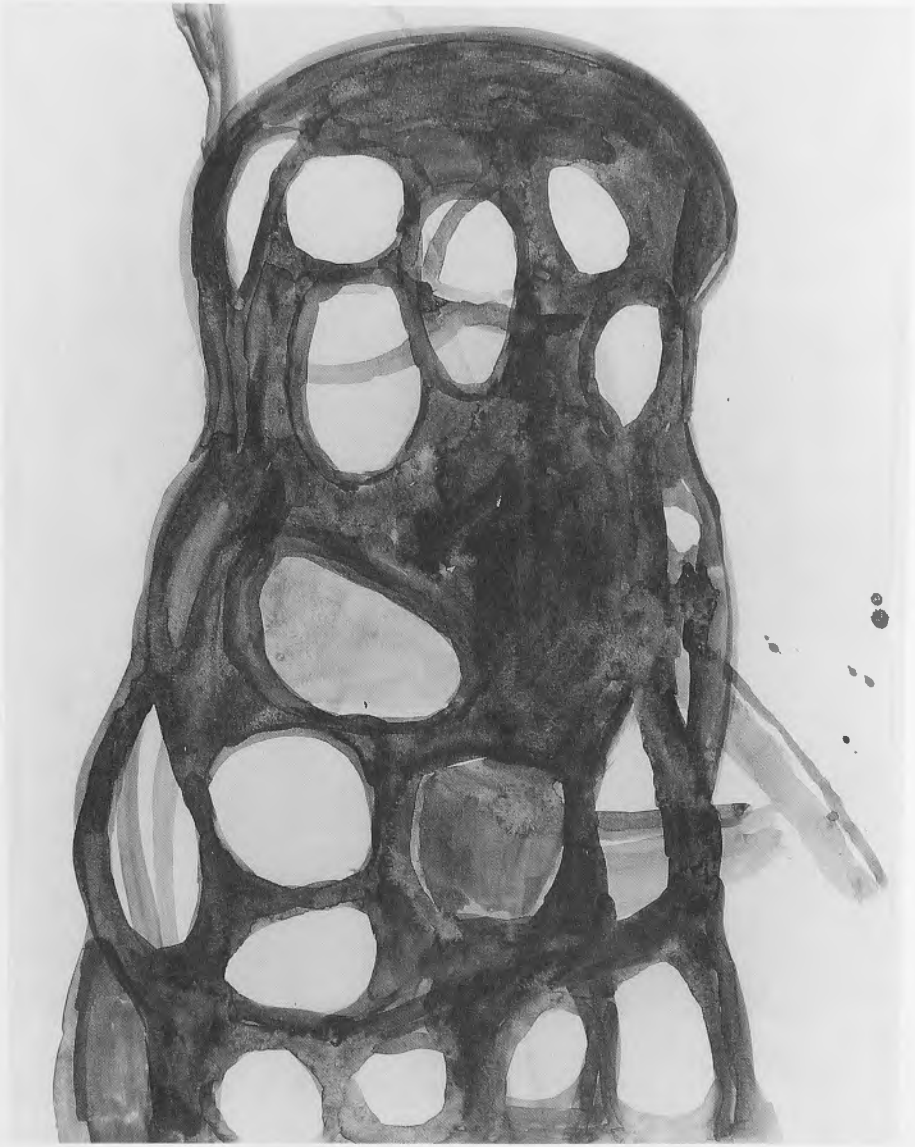
[And] had in his right hand stars
The mystery of the stars
and the golden candlesticks
The stars are the angels of the
angels of the churches
the candlesticks which thou
thou sawest are the churches
holdeth the stars in his right hand
of the golden candlesticks
hath the Spirits of God
and the stars
were lamps of fire burning
are the Spirits of God. And before the throne
sealed with seals
and to loose the seals thereof?
as it had been slain, having horns
horns and eyes, which are
are the Spirits of God
saw the angels which stood
and to them were given
the angels which had the
thunders uttered their voices
when the thunders had uttered
which the thunders uttered, and write
slain of men thousand: and the remnant
having heads
horns, and crowns upon his heads
up out of the sea, having heads
angels having the last
angels come out of the

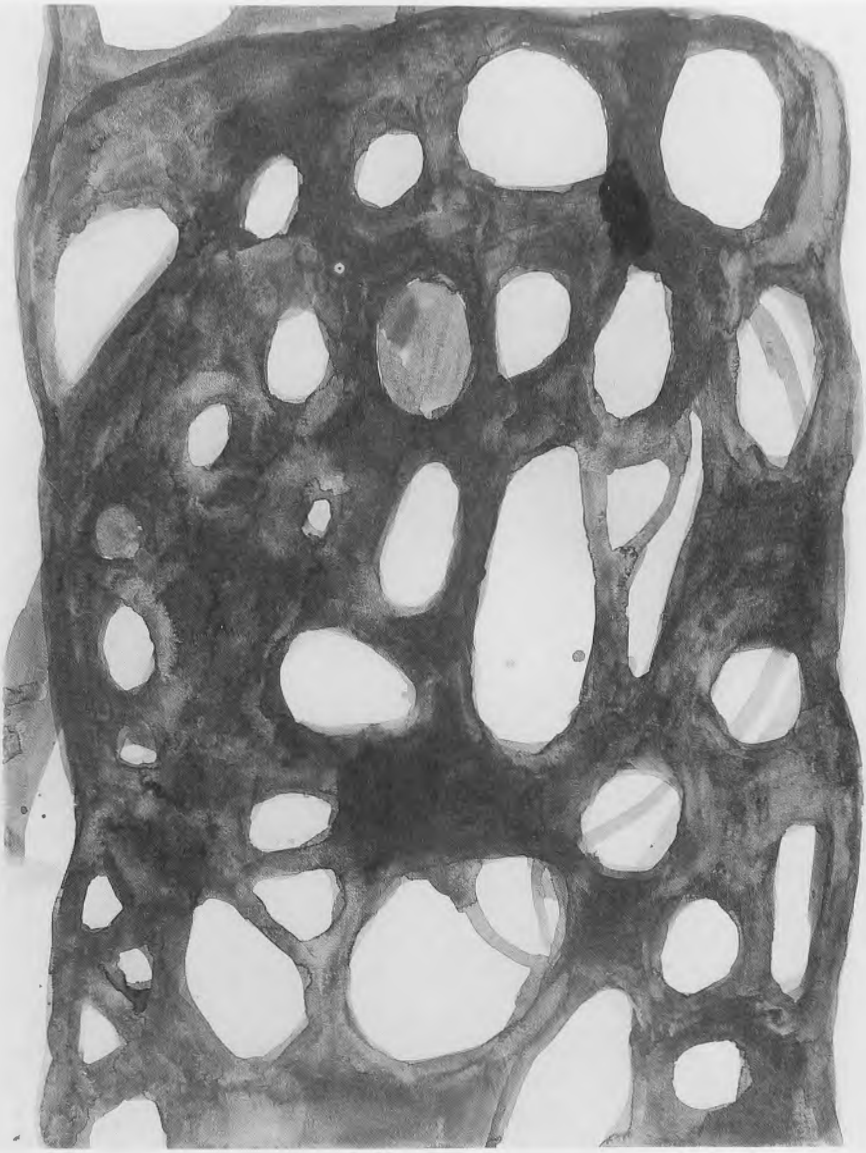
temple, having the plagues, clothed in
beasts gave unto the angels
the plagues of the angels
voice out of the temple saying to the angels
and the angel poured out
of the angels
which had the vials
of blasphemy, having heads
that carrieth her, which hath the heads
The heads are mountains
And there are kings

[And] he is the eighth, and is of the
the angels which had the
vials full of the seven last plagues, and
talked with me

Terry Winters

6-Field Sequence





6-FIELD SEQUENCE

Graphic artifacts—

Drawing a single transversal of the image

Shown as a multiple angle in time

The number appears in one play

From a single nominal eye point

A composite seen from all positions

Rendering the field of an interlaced image

July 25, 1996

Terry Winters
"6-Field Sequence"
1991
Graphite wash on paper
6 sheets, each 30" x 22.5"

Photo Credit: D. James Dee

ADONIS

A DESIRE MOVING THROUGH THE MAPS OF THE MATERIAL

(Tr. from the Arabic by Allen Hibbard and Osama Isber)

it came to pass—
knives fall from the heavens,
the body lurches forward,
the soul trailing behind it

it came to pass—
hammers of blacksmiths laboring inside the skull,
dumbness and extinction of races,
writing: an ideological acid
books: still-born buds

(a)

where shall I preserve my surviving feasts,
how can I free my wings
weeping in the cages of language and
how can I live in my memory,
a gulf of floating debris

[he named language a woman,
writing—love,
and began to search
for the shells
of oceans in hoopoe words
(the sign here points to something
other than the queen of sheba or solomon)]

shall a stone or a poppy root sprout between my shoulders, shall the animals imprisoned in me find a means of escape, shall I fall into lethargy and betray my limbs, shall I fill my lungs with sand and prostrate myself as a black stone in eternal obedience, shall I annoint my body with machine oil and engorge myself with "yes, yes, no no"

no, I have no homeland
save in these clouds
evaporating from lakes of poetry

shelter me, guard me, oh *daud, daud*!—oh, my language, my house
I hang you like an amulet on the neck of these times
and explode my passions in your name
not because you are the temple,
not because you are the father or the mother,
but because I dream to laugh and cry through you,
to translate my guts, to cling to you, shudder,
and let my sides shiver
like windows in the hands of a wind
just released from god's fingers

thus through you I am transformed into a breath
exhaled from the sky's mouth,
blown into the earth's gash

thus I embrace you and say, once again:

you are the body called tomorrow,
and on this body the dice of history are thrown

in order to make a mirror worthy of me
and to see myself reflected in it,
in order to create a space
large enough to contain my fears,
maybe I thought of putting on a coat with half-cut sleeves
or of walking with a half-bare foot,
or maybe I tried to cleave a cloud's vein
to quench my thirst,
or maybe I whispered "homeland," and it was enough
for me to tell the history of a dervish doomed to die,
covering his grave with my voice,
or maybe I tried to uproot the eiffel tower
and plant there a damascene jasmine,
or maybe I thought of inviting adam back
to build on earth a house for his love
and acknowledge his sons

here is the sun combing the sunset's hair, and there are bars
in paris which rise like the virgin on her ascension

I convene a meeting with angels of muscular medics,
I become as water and flow into the basin of my sorrows,
or
I become as the horizon and rise to the heights of my desires

I know, we die but once,
yet how many births there are,
and the only good in death
is to leave it behind

I know, the beyond is this rose,
the beyond is this woman,
and the face is but the back of the sky

I know, cloud by cloud
my skies will rise from earthly paradises

welcome to history and its specks of dust:
how can the mortal despair
so long as the wind is his road

there was no chance of meeting richard the lionheart,
or louis XIV, or even napoleon
so I found myself free,
wearing fog and enjoying the sight of dogs
lying on women's breasts,
but I don't remember seeing a single star
dance or read or walk like the stars of my childhood;

I have had to imagine the stars of qassabin[2]
to guide me while wandering through the streets,
hearing people's lamentations flow
without reprieve around the seine

he came to the café (the deux magots, I think),
with him came: the church of saint-germain des prés;
a sky with a paralyzed spine;
jean genet who sought to convince him
to be reconciled with god
for an unconvincing reason
(to discover the hell of heaven);
a land that does not wish to see the sky;
jugglers who read the stars;
and, finally, voices from the arab third world,
full of interpretations of the beyond

(b)

(how can I persuade al-ghazali[3]
to illumine his being
with the light of nietzsche
nonetheless I'll remind him:
you have been travelling toward the world
ever since its creation
without having yet arrived)

(in orly:
the third world seems a crippled elephant
falling with a parachute saying something like:
"paris is making new alliances with the planets,
and learning the revolution of the sun,"
then by the force of some power
the elephant becomes a stream of blood
spreading through houses and shops)

in the café,
indifferent to the noise,
I read neitzsche and thought him a flood—
yes, I should yield to the flood of meaning
I should, bowing like sunflowers, befriend the sun
I should submit to the waterlilies of desire
        in the lake of the body
I should empty myself, like a child
        whom I prepare for the future

have you seen the poet, his face blending
with the morning, his feet with the night,
have you seen him, leaning his back
against the light, trying to set fire to water,
have you seen how his papers
become crowns for the wind?

promiscuity reigned,
wolves, lying in wait of their prey,
wrapped in the fur of words,
sprang from the fables of la fontaine,
itinerants rested on the necks of empty bottles,
    some of them criticizing mallarmé,
    some of them dreaming of rimbaud,
    some of them reading marquis de sade

(c)

(. . in a place shaped like a windmill
where time is a wall of words:
the mortar fixing them drips like ink
. . . a statue of paper for don quixote, alone,
    a statue for his horse, alone,
and the air—a cloak
suspended from a lead-colored sky)

and the 16th arondissement seemed a forest
of bobbing heads, making a museum
for sexual organs on every corner,
in an ash covering the surface of space—
vocal cords intoned
something like:
warning—

rimbaud,
how can I cross this white world—
I whose body is prophecy,
whose house is the sahara,
how can I explain a light from the beyond
with worldly words

I must, I must—
I'll create my own morals,
I'll make from my death an inaugural poem

they prepare their atomic dust,
we repeat the prayer of the dead—
from water to sand, from sand to snow:
the whole world is a fish to catch

the east is a wound, politics merely pus,
but it will also rain in the west,
it will rain over houses where grass
of diesel and uranium grows,
and the rain will be muddy and black

oh, monsieur's bitch is pissing on the head of les invalides,
oh, madame's dog is shitting on the pillow of l'arc de triomphe

(d)

(. . . this is what was said about contagion
and the putrefaction of time's ovary;
machines transform people into purple soup
in an east furnished with gods of whom we see
nothing but their cloven hooves,
in a west which only reads its guts and jaws
while it collapses beneath silos of electronic seeds)

a dead man gave, a dead man took
and the one who has my soul in his hand,
and the one whose soul is in mine—
they join together in the chorus of speech
on the edge of a cliff

    is this world something other
    than that which I behold?

and you, oh supreme planets, moved by fingernails,
    I invite you to the banquet of catastrophe,
    history is seasoned by chefs who garnish plagues
    and all work is a sword slicing water

(e)

(black clouds converge from all directions,
    the surviving feasts about to expire,
    and the atom—a fly buzzing
    and creeping on the forehead of time—
oh, clandestine bread, devoured by electronic rats)

(f)

the western poet
must also become acquainted with
    weeping on the ruins,
    writing on sand,
he should learn
    how to unify balsam and poison
    and how to solve
    what can't be solved,
he must also learn
    how to thank the wind

here where the left builds nests
and where the right lays eggs,
I saw time accumulating in heaps of white powder,
while I measure the heights
to which birds of dreams can soar,
while the mosque of the fifth arrondissement
performs its ablutions
and enters the whiteness of prayer

in the morning, while the boulevard saint-michel coughs,
its guts bumping against the soles of passersby,
I enjoy watching the sky slip from between my shoulders,
and a stray cat meow into the ears of the wind

I can make out just two persons in paris:
one dreams, lost on the roads of may 1968;
the other is sprawled out on 16th century carpets

(g)

("what women! what books!"
exclaims the revolutionary guest
as he quickly becomes lost
as a point on a line
or a footnote or a corner
"did your throat stick to this cement,
did your flood ebb in that café,
and the west, what does it have
to offer your desert save sand,
and why is your voice not heard
save when it comes rising
from the reeds that still grow
around the springs remaining
in your generous land?"
oh, mysterious guest,
please don't be dismayed
if I tell you:
"work before death greets you,
die not like the butterfly,
but like the rose)

how then can I reconcile the ashes of paris
and our bleeding sun,
how can I reconcile the two shores of our common sea
while we contend with the emperors of absurdity
and dethrone the sultan of sense,
how can I reconcile the eiffel tower
and the egyptian obelisk in the place de concord—

I swear the former is cold and half-dead
I swear the latter is the most beautiful lover
and her bearing is the upright alif[4]
I swear the bed of human civilization has not known
a more dazzling nakedness

paris,
your light almost betrays me
(it crouches on crutches),
shall I ask the magic carpet to transport me—
I alight on monmartre, on the sill of sacre-coeur,
on an oval plate held by a sheep from jerusalem,
I recognize jacques simon,
who raised goats in his room,
I see people like as monsieur besson
and his wife who groom animals

(h)

1- (say that time has come with its banquet,
that life is time's pebble to cook
and death is its raw meat)

2- (say that speech is the caliph of papers,
the prophecy of wind)

and prepare for their funerals,
I visit a cemetery (quietly,
lest the corpses be roused),
I sit in cafés reminiscent of the café of the blind
in the arcade of the royal palace,
with all kinds of tired people
puffing out hours like cotton

paris,
I have reassembled your scattered parts
in my limbs
and created for you
a new body

(the soul is a speechless ghost,
the body alone can express itself)

here I am tracing the footsteps of the hunchback,
not the hunchback who slept
in the arms of notre dame,
but the one which can be seen,
everyday, a ghost creeping
along the sidewalks of saint-michel,

(i)

(he beholds the sky crucified
on the image of andré breton
and leaves a star
betrayed by the light of surrealism
to weep in his arms)

(j)

[the phoenix is not the stomach,
but the imagination—
then, what is the use of knocking
on marx's head as you knock
on a door, and of climbing him
like a ladder,
if desire remains armless,
if the dream remains a frozen river?
midst confusion he delivered this sermon
in bastille square (in the audience
were saint-just, robespierre and danton,

the night arching above him
in the 16th arrondissement
where the male is an animal park
and the female is a garden of androgynous plants

I say, in a whisper, "ghost," and ask, "nerval,
was the rope soft as you wished?"[5]

verlaine,
look, the arm of poetry extends from opera's dome,
holding the golden harp
and look, it is breaking up right where your corpse passed
on its way to its final resting place
your "loving feasts" accompanied the cart which took berlioz
to montmartre cemetery, listening to it neighing "farewell"
I say, in a whisper, "ghost," and head towards saint-germain
to greet apollinaire: "hello to you also, you ghost, hello"

along with all the rest)
a voice broke out: "to hell with the void
which swallows the self and the throat"
and voices replied: "amen"]

the eiffel tower notre dame the louvre

(is it a dream—the eiffel tower is no longer in its place and here is the louvre heading towards the eastern shore of the mediterranean as if it too wants to follow the footsteps of alexander the great, and here is notre dame sleeping as it prays, tapping the shoulder of the sky to make it a pillow for its dreams)

the eiffel tower notre dame the louvre

the mosque of the fifth arrondissement

(is a statue going to convince me that a western virgin was the first to become pregnant with reason—who said: "thus the stomach spoke—we deem the east and the west adversaries and the dust a judge," I look at faces and say: "The inanimate is not in the inanimate, but in man")

notre dame the mosque of the fifth arrondissement

weep, oh angels of hell,
you'll no longer find visitors whose roasting you'll relish;
group by group, all the animals go to paradise, the speaking and the dumb

it came to pass—
let the memory of races explode—

abu nuwas[6]

there are those of the order of humans
bestowed with speech, yet they do not speak,
not because they are mute
or have any physical defect,

in a desert fueled for invasion
war is declared
by this and that and this
not to liberate
but to preserve slavery—

and here is a hand which disrobes the air
and garbs it with fresh clothes

baudelaire

congealed angels in notre dame
need female bodies
in order to walk on air—

air which refuses to move
unless you inflate it with your soul—

where women are half-broken jars
in beds hidden beneath the vaults of the seine
and bridges are their floating dreams,

where the electronic mind wraps itself
in krishna's cloak and the black minotaur
lies in the arms of the white woman,

and here is a house my body leads me to
which I recognize as other than my body
in a night so beautiful
I could not tell it from my underwear
where god himself
is soaked by the sweat of the times

where angels of wisdom fly from their prisons
and rush to embrace the angels of desire
in a nebula of signs,
every sign a dictionary

it came to pass—
and explode, oh memory of races—

al-mutannabi'

piercings of the nails of the creed
prey chased by mice

creatures with heads of chickens
and frames of giants
in kingdoms—concubines

a person holding a staff
bearing a head,
a symbol of his power,
shreds of corpses and heads,
commas and movements

hugo

in a time—a refinery from which
the blood of the murdered
and the saliva of the murderer
pour out together

a chaos in which things mix—
straw animals run
followed by blind babies

heads like orpheus's
except they swim in smoke
not in water

fables pulse from vein to vein
in a history wound on a reel for preservation—
(praise be camphor and celluloid)

in a scream emitted by no lips
you see hands flailing with no bodies

feet walk at the same time both to the left and to the right

workers return every evening to their shacks
bearing twigs which are but thighs
of the unemployed
do the conditions of the body faithfully correspond
to the conditions of the soul?
I asked that man in beirut wearing red slippers
and riding a locust who shouted this refrain repeatedly
to me: vanity, all is vanity
no, no
my body likes the paleness of the sky
and my dreams change their course,

I imagine that being—making a noose of his face,
passing along the banks of the euphrates and the nile
at the same time he hugs the shores of the seine, the hudson and the thames—
does not walk but sleep-walks in order to feel his limbs

praise be to all ambiguity,
shall I await the harvest of other seeds?

my passion is full of seeds issuing secretly from heraclitus and nietzsche

for, in my sorrows there is something of laurel leaves
and between my shoulders there sets a sail
whose image I once saw in the mediterranean sea near arwad island[8]
(strange that its name has escaped my memory),

for, I am chasing the head of an atom
coming from an electronic cave,
wrapping itself like an onion,
then splitting into sounds of a clerical trumpet
still attached to the trunk of the 16th century,

for, it is enough in this age to make a body of a man
by using the legs of an ant and the head of a locust
(and for his soul choose anything you wish
from the stalls of the souq),

for, the power of the sky still bows
before the chair of joan of arc,
she whose sword still drips water
which heals the leprous,

for, the stomach of this age still is nero's,

for, when I read about freedom in this world,
        it seems I'm chasing a three-colored rat,
        which in turn is chasing a cat with two tails and three wings

is the body of paris drying up? I asked myself
in champs de mars while welcoming a planet
which quickly changed into mimosa down,
round which gathered stars of speech
small as marie antoinette's ass;
and the trees did not believe the flowers,
nor did the flowers trust the sun—
the wind alone was indifferent,
and the dust applauded—
I thought while looking at the eiffel tower
I saw a girl raising it with her arms
(something contrary to what lewis carroll told of),
faces round it were shaped like clouds, ever-changing color;
the heads were neither lunar nor solar
but rather from another planet
which I can't remember how to describe
(I'll ask littré about it later)
oh, what paradoxes, which alone, are logical—
oh, what contradictions, in which we alone can see unity—

when my musing subsided I said calmly,
paris,
maybe soon (while I enter the bowels of nature,
reciting the names of your streets:
falls street, brook street, poplar street,
acacia street, willow street, almond street,
chestnut street, cherry street, mulberry street,
plum street, fig street, rose street, linden street—
not to mention mouzaïa street, with its arabic resonance)
maybe soon I'll align your vowels and those in my name,
leaving consonants to their heavenly slumber,
or maybe I'll weave of them a carpet no French poet,
not even ponge himself, would be able to tell from a wing

she says that . . .
I say let it be . . .
I throw my pens into a trench on the face of the moon,
and give my memories to a wrinkle in the neck of the seine—
flow, oh river, take away the dust and its seasons,
don't forget that river running between you and yourself,
take care of the femininity in you that appears only as maleness,
take care of that being in you that says he perfected you—

flow, oh seine,
in currents that make silt from people and other debris—

I see the seine flowing—
bearing the silt of arabs and portuguese
of africa and asia, and the remaining labyrinths,
bearing the moss-covered bells of europe,

I see it flowing—
with it flow horses from the middle ages,
renaissance carriages and modern marionettes,
the voices of baudelaire, lautréamont,
nerval, hugo, rimbaud, mallarmé and picasso

it flows, and in its current
revolutions and histories
crumble like stale bread

(k)

(time comes with its beasts,
but how can it tame them?
time comes with its abysses,
yet can it be reflected in them?
time comes with its guillotines,
and all things tremble—
I think your name, oh time,
sticks in the throat
like a nut of nausea)

(l)

(life falters between man's footsteps—
is that why he greets the matter
around him
as if it were his death foretold?
is that why he repeats his question:
will the world be able to sleep
in beds other than those made for killing?)

I say that . . .
she says let it be . . .
flow, oh river,
seat the world's antipodes on your knees
and give them the last breath of air

water is desire
and divers who devise pleasure
and lust hold the banks

it is my desire moving
through the maps of the material
and the moments open in the beds
of the place, like sexual organs

on my walks every morning
from 116 lourmel street
to 1 miollis street, I read
the book of oceans
in the drop of water,

(m)

(neither the east nor the west
belongs to god—pardon me, goethe—
and the north is sinking
in the ice of memory and
whenever the south thinks
itself cured of a disease
it contracts another
then consoles itself
by repeating this refrain:
joy is the closest friend of sadness)

I touch the light that works
like a plough and I discover
how the poet remains a baby
though he's as old as the horizon

thus I no longer hesitate to say:
"the I and the other
are me,"
and time is but a basket
to collect poetry

unexpectedly I meet rimbaud
and we renew our pact:
the veil, it is the light;
the west is another name for the east

no, my body is neither a pelican nor a water lily
but beneath my eyelashes sleeps ophelia
who mistakenly discovered me
and all my dreams are lakes gone mad

(n)

(why is it that his feet
know the seine better
than they know the tigris or barada?[9]

what a fool[10]—he likes man
better than the earth,
the earth better than the homeland)

(o)

I - [the seine has yet to flow east
(the reference here is to something
other than 'the divine blessings,'
praised by goethe in his verse—

now I advise myself aloud
before hamlet:
I must be wise,
always remembering that love and suffering
are of the same family,
ceasing to care
about the day and the night,
the moon and the sun

it is true as hamlet shows
that love has many wars
and that from time to time
a storm is needed in the body
to rearrange its limbs,
thus this evening I watched over
the flocks of streets in paris
and when I saw the fountain of flame
explode from the thighs of buildings
I murmured:
nothing clarifies me like this obscurity
(or perhaps it was: nothing obscures me like this clarity)

the turban, the tent,
the curved sword, song);
its water has yet to mix
like that of the euphrates
with the planet's light]

II - (we have yet to raise
another pillar of wisdom,
for us to make spaceships
to transport us not to planets
but to our own homes,
for us to create winged creatures
to transport, at no cost, all the poor
who dream of circumambulating
their holy places
we have yet to change wind
into a perfect roll of the dice)

this is me—
I waft from my race like perfume
from a dying rose,
I undulate and spread
like bees I make my own honey
this is life—cold,
scarcely even a wound,
I see nothing but machines
swarming in the fields
of human breath,
and there is neither day nor night—
only a continuous thread of disjointed moments—

the outside is not my home
the inside confines me—

like a perfume from a dying rose
I waft from my race

I don't want to name
I want to be lofty as light
I don't want to hold on
I want to be like the wind

Paris, 1986-1987

III- (how can he be at ease—
a fish in the water
of these times,
how can he live in a body
drained of its substance,
how can he dismantle this corporal body
made of his speech,
a body supported
by the columns
of an incorporal language)

NOTES

1 *Daud* is a letter found uniquely in the Arabic alphabet. Hence the language itself is commonly referred to as *lugha-al daud* or the language of *daud*.

2 A village in the hills not far from the seaside town of Jebleh, in Syria, where Adonis grew up.

3 Islamic mystic philosopher (1058-1111).

4 Alif, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, is simply a straight vertical line, like an "I". A moral interpretation is often given to its upright character.

5 A reference, no doubt, to Nerval's suicide by hanging.

6 Abu Nuwas, the poet whom Adonis has called the Baudelaire of the Arabs, lived from 757-814.

7 The great Arab poet (915-965), whose name means "the Would-be Prophet," is well known for his poetry praising the rulers whose patronage he enjoyed.

8 A small island, off the coastal village of Tartus, in northwest Syria, not far from the poet's hometown, Qassabin.

9 The Barada is the small river which runs through (and under) Damascus.

10 "Fool" seems the best translation of *bahlul*, the Persian word Adonis frequently uses. As well as various other meanings of the word ("generous master," "honest man," and so on), might be the poet himself.

Because of many of the line lengths, this poem has been set vertically in *Sulfur*. Such a presentation occasionally creates stanza breaks where no stanza breaks exist in the original.

ROBERT VANDERMOLEN

TWO POEMS

RAVINE

A soughing sound
Through trees and shadow

Fuddles the issue

Crude face with birdsong—

If you could paint
Your soul

It would appear
Primitive,
Frowzy

Lichen wrapped,
The north slope
Of a deer's liver—

A deep sweep of wind
Would alter the landscape considerably

THAT BUNNY SMELL

That bunny smell at the fence
The dog understands

While you spot a neighbor
Unzipping his pants

To urinate behind his ash,

A free lot between us.
All the men

Are watching football inside
Or napping with their wives

It's embarrassing
When he sees you

Of course the dog is trying
To undo the fence—

A worm in the guts

Trying to make a long rope
Out of knots

Perhaps his mate
Is pouring whiskey

Into the sink,
His underwear out a front window.

Blackberry vines
Concealing mounds

Of shoved soil.
Contractor's trash

A warren of tunnels.
Bad rumors.

My dog whines,
Fumbles back and forth—

Maybe he missed deer camp
This year

His portfolio is dying

From an upper window
His son cries Dad

FORREST GANDER

FIELD GUIDE TO SOUTHERN VIRGINIA

True as the circumference to its center. Woodscreek Grocery, Rockbridge County. Twin boys peering from either edge of the door, cheeks crammed with fireballs. The Sand Plum trees flowering in clusters by the levee. She makes a knot on the inside knob and ties my arms up against the door. Williamsburg green. With a touch as faint as a watermark. Tracing cephalon, pygidium, glabella.

If analogy suggests coincidence, homology shows descent. The row of ant lions barely within the drip line of our roof. Where Indian grass and Redtop grow high as her scar. Roses of wave ripples and gutter casts. Your sex hidden by goat's beard. Laminations in the sediment. All preserved as internal molds in a soft, dark shale.

Swayback, through freshly cut stalks, stalks the yellow cat. Can you smell where analyses end, the Orchard Oriole begins? Slap her breasts lightly to see them quiver. Delighting in this. Desiccation cracks and plant debris throughout the interval. In Blackwater River, fishnets float from the Tupelo's spongy root, chopped into corks. There may be sprawling precursors, volant clades there are none.

About termites, Mrs. Elsinore explained, there are two sides to the floor. A flock of crows slaughters all sixty lambs. The gambit declined, less promising. Toward the east, red and yellow colors prevail. For the entirety of the Ordovician. Tonguing green olives from the interstice of your thighs.

In addition, the trilobites were tectonically deformed. Snap-on tools glinting from magenta Loosestrife, the air sultry with creosote and cicadas. You made me to lie down in a peri-Gondwanan back-arc basin. Semen passing back and forth between their mouths. Disappearing like cotton candy. Takes a full breath, bursts into the inner cave behind Panther Falls. Force and sound at full gallop. Bi-directional prod marks.

Egrets picketing the spines of cattle in fields edged with common tansy. Flowers my father gathered for my mother to chew. To induce abortion. A common, cosmopolitan agnostoid lithofacies naked in the foothills. I love the character of your intelligence, its cast as well as pitch. Border wide without marginal spines. At high angles to the inferred shoreline.

It is the thin flute of the clavicles, each rain-pit above them. The hypothesis of flexural loading. Nipples pink as Steepleflower. One particular day, four hundred million years ago, the mud stiffened and held the stroke of waves. Orbital motion. Raking leaves from the raspberries, you uncover a nest of spring salamanders.

LUIGI BALLERINI

THREE POEMS

(Tr. from the Italian
by Jeremy Parzen
and the author)

EEPHUS PITCH

We obey the coaxings of our end
—Wallace Stevens

when lacunae or false moves loom
and a severed hand floats up, oily,
a widespread profile knocking and pinging,
when people begin to say, "this is a jam,
an inert weighbridge, a balk," the catch is
that in the end all that really matters
is the nature of the Eephus pitch.
It's not so much that you can't see

the lob or that the gnawing and its
indelible reason are smothered by the utterance
of a jubilant fanning; it's the harmony
of the parts that interferes, the rust,
the departure of a jealous variant:
and those borders in the center, and that
dampened view at once exonerating and
discoloring. I admit to stealing this trade

along with the idea that a challenge well-met
or well-made (a single matrix is suspected)
was the more profitable half of the contract,

Note on "Eephus Pitch": the Italian title of this poem, "Alla Puskas," alludes to a style of penalty kick made famous by the Hungarian football player. The "Eephus Pitch" was a deceptive lob developed by baseball player Rip Sewell on the 1940s.

the guarantee of safe-haven, if not that
of passage: sure he was handsome, and they
laid him down in the infield, and watered him
so that, in secret, he would smell nice:
like a panther, I mean, or a phoenix

italics

it's laughter that sets the angry mind apart
from smoke, from the oracle, it's the restless
lull of laughter eating away at the track
and the discordant antennae of delay,
it's the parched steam of the thrust
that activates the wound and twists its jargon:
the weather breaks, the guest takes to his heels,
I'll emphasize myself, if you ask, shoot myself
in the mouth with an air-gun, and I'm not one
to sing cold, except when threatened with gain,
with a grassy ford full of double meanings

leave yourself at the door

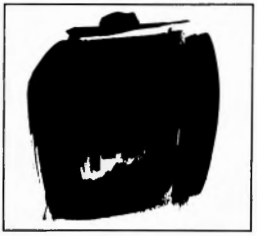
for Klaus

when the trial-run is respite, and illicit foams
protect the ultramarines, the sepia-blacks, the Sienna-reds
that skip a vintage or two, when your unnamed likeness,
the theft, the cabal of stranded words, run out of breath,
when vinegar, or its worm breaks away, and a habit

dissolves the escape, turning it to praise and corollary:
who seizes the bandoleer, who trespasses, who ships his
oars? who has the heart to yell the show's been canceled,
who sticks out from the wall, who fathoms the marrow
and the makeup? the flood is also full of risks, arched
forgiving voices, sleeping cures, with fallen shrapnel
and you with your refrain: "he was one of the best
in health-class." "And in good conduct," my sweet iguana,
"in the quality of foods and silks, in acquisitions
and sales, in the precarious inflection of the real"

Barbara Guest

Quill, Solitary *APPARITION*



Barbara Guest's poetry and her novel, *Seeking Air,* have been fundamental to my work and life for twenty years. Of late, her work increases in acceleration. Quill, Solitary *Apparition* is of perfect weight. The whole is on a blade. I feel the poetry moves beyond me and fills in where I will go.

— Mei-mei Berssenbrugge

Where is this world so similar to our own and yet parallel to it, detached, with passion, urgently contemplative? Perception is here purified by a flame which at last we dare call poetry. There's high enegy (in this parting from modernity and its medieval trappings) made of elements which become words transcending themselves into the solitude of pure light.

— Etel Adnan

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TAM LIN NEVILLE

THE LAST SUPPERS OF THE HUNDRED YEAR OLD WOMAN

Number my days,
there will I be
or by some
place you don't go to. . . .
There are weeds,
not much light
ground I once turned,
dirt bed. Bed my back along
this stuffing, springs. . . .
Each day
into which I swallow
pear mush on a spoon.
She feeds me tea
that falls in the pan.
So it is, she says,
Tuesday.

There are good plates in the cupboard.
Some meals we had over.
Some were done.
It was once
ones that came back
and some that none could follow.
What they said, mashing down with a fork
or grit to wash away sand
so many could eat.
An empty plate
not ready again.

The day it was to come home
she stood,
an apron over her head.
Spoke, she would not eat.
He pushed the meat. . . .
Napkin, soil.
Those were the green china roses
and one that was split.
At midnight, they turn
over my pillow.
It is not like counting.
They say:
Come back. We are done. No one was there.
The day was always the end of the day.
How much can be saved? I said,
It is reeling.

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twenty years ago i
knew about love. now
i am tired. i study
primary needs.
i wonder about cowboys
going to sleep on
stony ground, their
saddles their pillows,
the hard day behind them.

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DENNISON SMITH

TWO POEMS

LETTER FROM AN UNCLE IN THE NAVY, ASSIGNED TO McMURDO STATION TO SUPERVISE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST ATOMIC REACTOR IN ANTARCTICA, 1970

Negative August

Twisted to the Flag and freed along slack
Plains of Black / White

Combustible Midnight / his eyes rounded off. . .

Even though we have already one female scientist [bracket] with
[husband
Russians plying toasts to Camp Vodha / a boozy New York voice

Cape Crozier / the damnedest collection of Playboy Centerfolds
Wedge and berg ice / to winter over / fleshly love in the
[Weddell seal

Blue tongue. . .

Or a lead in the floe where the sled dogs drowned at Christmas
To Crack and he will float forever. . .

Breath hole. . .

I long he wrote for unknown words:
Ope: a thin covered passage between English houses

Gloam and Angel fords
Oxtail, icecream and shadow. . .

Enters closed rooms and closets, confessionals, she is dust

I saw sweat in cold ground, saw the calcium shine, oxalite of

A squaw in her swell, a winged female
And isolate death

Glass in the spit of her hand

Between us. . .
Eyelids / tin layer / five and a half acres of tunnel / uninhabited
[Last

ides

horizon disfigured, still in the ring
blown midnight or momentary cool

hazel, and bent, oxidized

under your weight and your own attraction

creosote
cat nipples
hinges of birch

you and the objects in the field

(i shit, it girdles, it soothes, black back to the beginning)

now the moon disappears from the perfect body

coiled and come out of there jezebel:
forcemeat.

ash mourners, rummies, about in the broil
singing, the clow snapped

flow. . .

butter run down for stretches dark

rot and
up the flume and

the verbal grasp, lychnis gone. . .
willow stopped. . .lure. . .ire

breba
breccia

litter of transition, clung
roughly resembling a bird

GWYN MCVAY

TWO POEMS

THE CARDIFF GIANT

. . .every man is a peece of the *Continent,* a part of the *Maine;*
if a *Clod* be washed away by the *Sea, Europe* is the lesse. . .
—John Donne

You hoax—*Like the island of Surtsey,*
off Iceland, spewing ropy lava down the sea

"Our first point of suspicion was that
the genitals were poorly differentiated"

Die Schamteile, parts of shame: this quartz
axolotl, this larva of diatom-earth:

He wades in the channel at Dover,

talking a crumbled language in which *K*
replaces every *L,* mouthful of chalk,

old Latinist: *My name is* Surdus, *the deaf one*
Sursum corda, *lift up your hearts*

and in this exact carving,
this gypsum glyph, his stone mouth,

there are soft teeth made of flesh

I have wounded my head & must rest
it on these crossed pickaxes

In the lines of glacier-scar, hachures,
map-fissures, shapes distill

A zinc tub full of ice. Some books
full of wheat and mud. A skeleton-horse,

He falls in a flare of xenon,
face to face with the virus called *holy earth,*

this manmade Antaeus:

"Ymir
was the first giant, and when he died
the universe was made from his body"

practicing economies of scale:

A fragment of cheekbone crumbles
when struck by the prospector's axe

It was salt-dough all along, the gism
and bread of this grim mineral ball,

dust and bits of talk: a hoax exhumed
from the mainland:

"*Europe* is the lesse"

A PHENOMENOLOGY

I.

About yourself finding a bison's teeth, on the ground
and then loose in your mouth, thick and aching,

about digging with your fingers in gravel and shell holes
for wet roots, translucent as X-rays of stars

Stari Most, the old bridge, the stones of it in Mostar
set loose from their sockets, its towering arch

crumbled to dirt—this chip of a clay jar, broken
at a soaring angle, cathedral's vault in the palm,

this molar heavy as rounds from a tank, its cusp
a starry roof, a dome built from mortar and stones

II.

Cathérine, to speak openly: your throat, on the lid of your tomb,
your stone hair loose, your lips open, as if at any moment

your head might loll, you might gasp—the slight marble
hollows between ribs, your hand knotted over your sex,

sinews drawn rigid—How could the sculptor have known
this wasting that would become commonplace?

Gaudite, be glad: in the gaps where the bones of the knuckle
part and then touch, in this lightless transit, is praise

III.

There, the clocks are just striking

As if, somewhere, a meteorite rings
on a chipped curbstone, immutable,
lighting the streets from below

In the Middle Ages, men had no great thought
that they did not write down in stone,

a glittering excrescence, a shedding
of mica flakes, minute lettering—
Anzicek, Praznika, a church, as if

on this map, the auras and lineaments
could be fingered and read, like syllables
from a phonograph playing in English
O love o love o careless love

These shards, an enigmatic childbirth
in which the bones of the pelvis gape open
wide enough to let light in, to seem transparent

JORIE GRAHAM

LE MANTEAU DE PASCAL

I have put on my great coat it is cold.

It is an outer garment.

Coarse, woolen.

Of unknown origin.

*

It has a fine inner lining but it is
as an exterior that you see it—a grace.

*

I have a coat I am wearing. It is a fine admixture.
The woman who threw the threads in the two directions,
[headlong,
has made, skillfully, something dark-true,
as the evening calls the bird up into
the branches of the shaven hedgerows,
to twitter bodily
a makeshift coat—the boxelder cut back stringently by the owner
that more might grow next year, and thicker, you know—
the birds tucked gestures on the inner branches—
and space in the heart,
not shade-giving, not
chronological. . .Oh transformer, logic, where are you here in
[this fold,
my name being called-out now but back, behind,
in the upper world. . . .

*

I have a coat I am wearing I was told to wear it.
Someone knelt down each morning to button it up.
I looked at their face, down low, near me.
What is *longing?* what is a *star?*
Watched each button a peapod getting tucked back in.
Watched harm with its planeloads folded up in the sleeves.
Watched grappling hooks trawl through the late-night waters.
Watched bands of stations scan unable to ascertain.
There are fingers, friend, that never grow sluggish.
They crawl up the coat and don't miss an eyehole.
Glinting in kitchenlight.
Supervised by the traffic god.
Hissed at by grassblades that wire-up outside
their stirring rhetoric—this is your land, this is my *my*—

*

You do understanding, don't you, by looking?
The coat, which is itself a ramification, a city,
floats vulnerably above another city, ours,
the *city on the hill* (only with hill gone),
floats in illustration
of what was once believed, and thus was visible—
(all things believed are visible)—
floats a Jacob's ladder with hovering empty arms, an open throat,
a place where a heart might beat if it wishes,
pockets that hang awaiting the sandy whirr of a small secret,
folds where the legs could be, with their kneeling mechanism,
the floating fatigue of an after-dinner herald,
not guilty of any treason towards life except fatigue,
a skillfully cut coat, without chronology,
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed—
as then it is, abruptly, the last stitch laid in, the knot bit off—
hung there in Gravity, as if its innermost desire,
numberless the awaitings flickering around it,
the other created things also floating but not of the same order,
[no,
not like this form, built so perfectly to mantle the body,

the neck like a vase awaiting its cut flower,
a skirting barely visible where the tucks indicate
the mild loss of bearing in the small of the back,
the grammar, so strict, of the two exact shoulders—
and the law of the shouldering—
and the chill allowed to skitter up through,
and those crucial spots where the fit cannot be perfect—
oh skirted loosening aswarm with lessenings,
with the mild pallors of unaccomplishment,
flaps night-air collects in,
folds. . .But the night does not annul its belief in,
the night preserves its love for, this one narrowing of infinity,
that floats up into the royal starpocked blue its ripped, distracted
[supervisor—
this coat awaiting recollection, this coat awaiting the fleeting
[moment, the true moment, the hill, the vision of the hill,
and then the moment when the prize is lost, and the erotic
[tinglings of the dream of reason
are left to linger mildly in the weave of the fabric according to
[the rules,
the wool gabardine mix, with its grammatical weave,
never never destined to lose its elasticity,
its openness to abandonment,
its willingness to be disturbed.

*

July 11. . . Oaks: the organization of this tree is difficult. Speaking generally no doubt the determining planes are concentric, a system of brief contiguous and continuous tangents, whereas those of the cedar wd. roughly be called horizontals and those of the beech radiating but modified by droop and by a screw-set towards jutting points. But beyond this since the normal growth of the boughs is radiating there is a system of spoke-wise clubs of green—sleeve-pieces. And since the end shoots curl and carry young scanty leaf-stars these clubs are tapered, and I have seen also pieces in profile with chiseled outlines, the blocks thus made detached and lessening towards the end. However the knot-star is the chief thing: it is whorled, worked round, and

this is what keeps up the illusion of the tree. Oaks differ much, and much turns on the broadness of the leaves, the narrower giving the crisped and starry and catharine-wheel forms, the broader the flat-pieced mailed or chard-covered ones, in wh. it is possible to see composition in dips, etc. But I shall study them further. It was this night I believe but possibly the next that I saw clearly the impossibility of staying in the Church of England.

*

How many coats do you think it will take?

The coat was a great-coat.

The Emperor's coat was.

How many coats do you think it will take?

The undercoat is dry. What we now want is?

The sky can analyze the coat because of the rips in it.

The sky shivers through the coat because of the rips in it.

The rips in the sky ripen through the rips in the coat.

There is no quarrel.

*

I take off my coat and carry it.

*

There is no emergency.

*

I only made that up.

*

Behind everything the sound of something dripping

The sound of something: I will vanish, others will come here,
[what is that?

The canvas flapping in the wind like the first notes of our
[absence

An origin is not an action though it occurs at the very start

Desire goes traveling into the total dark of another's soul
looking for where it breaks off

I was a hard thing to undo

*

The life of a customer

What came on the paper plate

overheard nearby

an impermanence of structure

watching the lip-reading

had loved but couldn't now recognize

*

What are the objects, then, that man should consider most
[important?

What sort of a question is that he asks them.

The eye only discovers the visible slowly.

It floats before us asking to be worn,

offering "we must think about objects at the very moment
when all their meaning is abandoning them".

and "the title provides a protection from significance"

and "we are responsible for the universe."

*

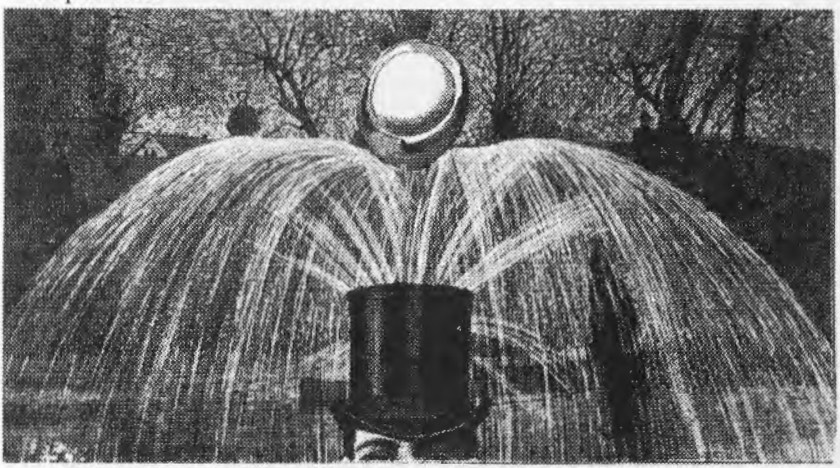
I have put on my doubting, my wager, it is cold.
It is an outer garment, or, conversely a natural covering,
so coarse and woolen, also of unknown origin,
a barely apprehensible dilution of evening into
an outer garment, or, conversely a natural covering,
to twitter bodily a makeshift coat,
that more might grow next year, and thicker, you know,
not shade-giving, not chronological,
my name being called out now but from out back, behind,
an outer garment, so coarse and woolen,
also of unknown origin, not shade-giving, not chronological,
each harm with its planeloads folded up in the sleeves,
you do understand, don't you, by looking?
the jacob's ladder with its floating arms its open throat,
that more might grow next year, and thicker, you know,
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,
the other created things also floating but not of the same order,
not shade-giving, not chronological,
you do understand, don't you, by looking?
a neck like a vase awaiting its cut flower,
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,
the moment the prize is lost, the erotic tingling,
the wool-gabardine mix, its grammatical weave
—you do understand, don't you, by looking?—
never never destined to lose its elasticity,
it was this night I believe but possibly the next
I saw clearly the impossibility of staying
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,

also of unknown origin, not shade-giving, not chronological
since the normal growth of boughs is radiating
a system of spoke-wise clubs of green—sleeve pieces—
never never destined to lose its elasticity
my name being called out now but back, behind,
hissing how many coats do you think it will take
"or try with eyesight to divide" (there is no quarrel)
behind everything the sound of something dripping
a system of spoke-wise clubs of green—sleeve-pieces—
filled with the sensation of suddenly being completed
the wool gabardine mix, the grammatical weave,
the never-never-to-lose-its-elasticity: my name
flapping in the wind like the first note of my absence
hissing how many coats do you think it will take
are you a test case is it an emergency
flapping in the wind the first note of something
overheard nearby an impermanence of structure
watching the lip-reading, there is no quarrel,
I will vanish, others will come here, what is that,
never never to lose the sensation of suddenly being
completed in the wind—the first note of our quarrel—
it was this night I believe or possibly the next
filled with the sensation of being suddenly completed,
I will vanish, others will come here, what is that now
floating in the air before us with stars a test case
that I saw clearly the impossibility of staying

KRISTIN PREVALLET

CHAPTER TWO: REPRODUCTION WITHIN THE INVISIBLE *from* PERTURBATION, MY SISTER (*a study of Max Ernst's* HUNDRED HEADLESS WOMEN)

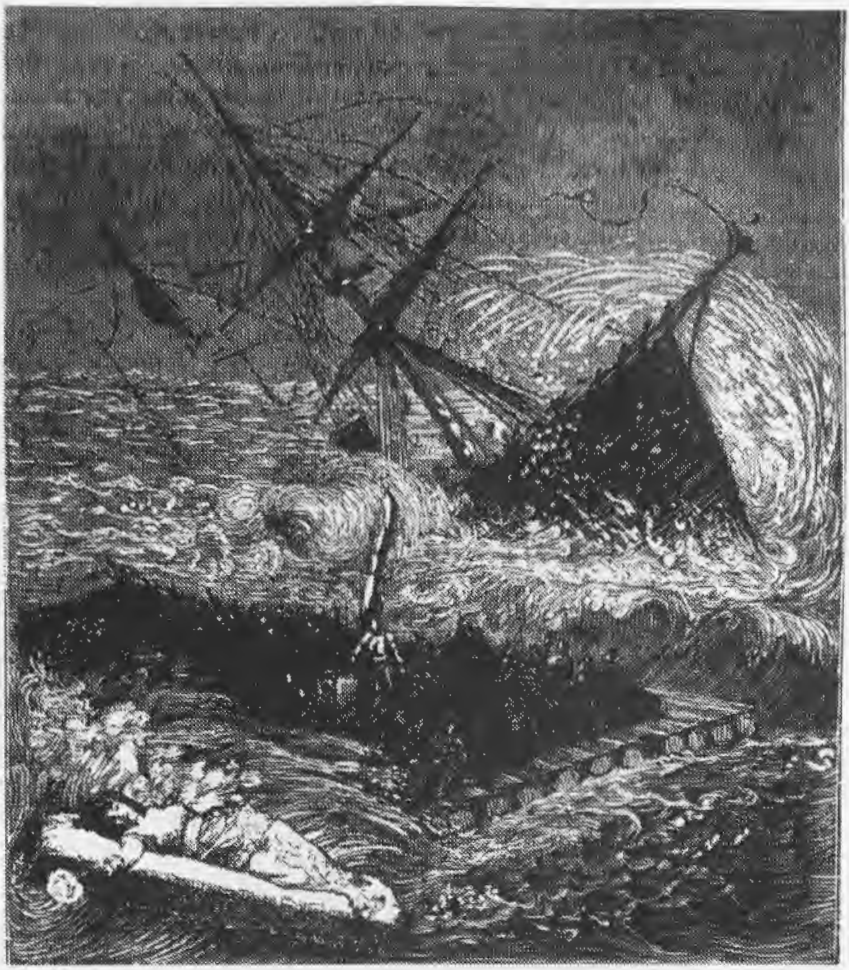
1. Copulation



The Grande Jatte hibernators.

The fountain sustained an egg that bounced from stream to stream, as if a gentleman's top hat had somehow imposed on the flow of things and claimed it could hatch the world (shouting):

Note: *La Femme 100 Têtes* was first published in Paris in 1929 and is the first of three collage novels created by Max Ernst. The book consists of 156 collages, the materials for which Ernst took from turn-of-the-century pulp novels and advertisements, divided into seven chapters each with a short text beneath each collage written by Ernst, and later translated by Dorthea Tanning into English. For each collage I wrote one prose paragraph, and then rearranged the paragraphs into new chapters to tell a "narrative" different from Ernst's. Thus, the collages here reproduced are not in the same order as they appear in the original book. Needless to say, I had not intended that my text be read at all in affiliation with the collages, except that I wanted to name Ernst as the essential source. In other words, the text was written to be independent of the collages from which it was created. Finally however, the desire for a liberation of text and image, word and source, or collage from the materials which shaped it is inevitably impossible, attracted as we may be to the attempt.

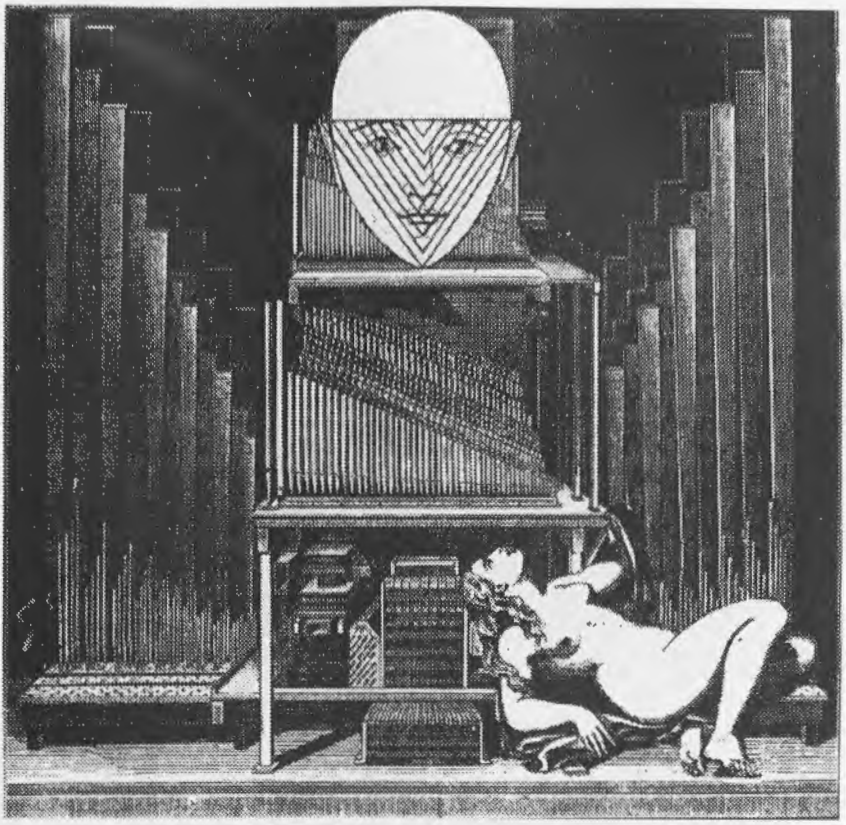


Sea of serenity.

"You there, woman, whose sleeping figure is the shape of fear, have you seen the curse of shipwrecked boats struggling with the sea? Did help cry out of the sailor who was drowning and save him in spite of his desire to die? The sky in all its wanderings through black and unseen nights seeks your hair to glide on, but you lie there afraid that some mad rapist watches as you turn."

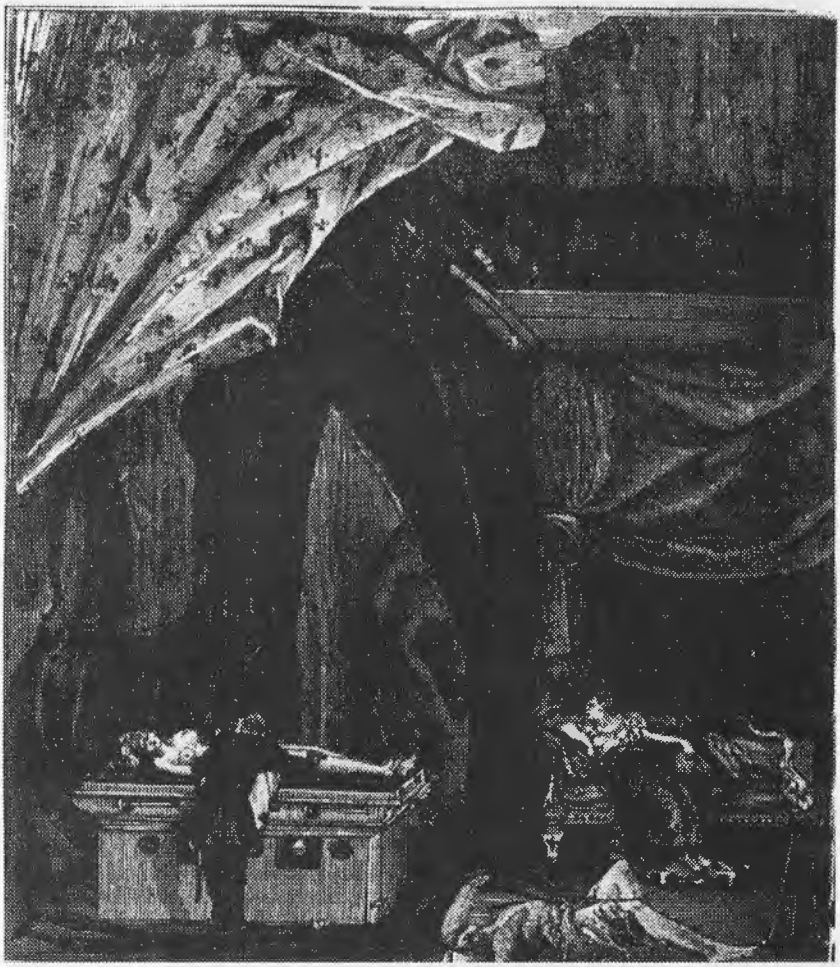
The hundred headless woman opens her august sleeve.

Dream on you frail men draped in linen, who cling to the body of a woman floating heavily in sleep, the cacti is prodding in the deep, and will sting through the layers of fleece upon fleece until you are aroused or arising with the lighted missiles of morning. You assume that she will carry you in flight, dying as you are through the milk that spills from between your legs where flows the silken anguish of four boars mating.



The Immaculate Conception.

To the organist's surprise, the tune he was piping gave birth to a god wrapped in chords. Sadly, the tune was no longer music to his ears, but lay idle in wait for her ascent into heaven. Music, she who raises skylines to peak in heaven, ordered the organist to keep his organ prone and dangling, and in spite of his desire to join with the arousing events on the alter, he dutifully obeyed his muse.

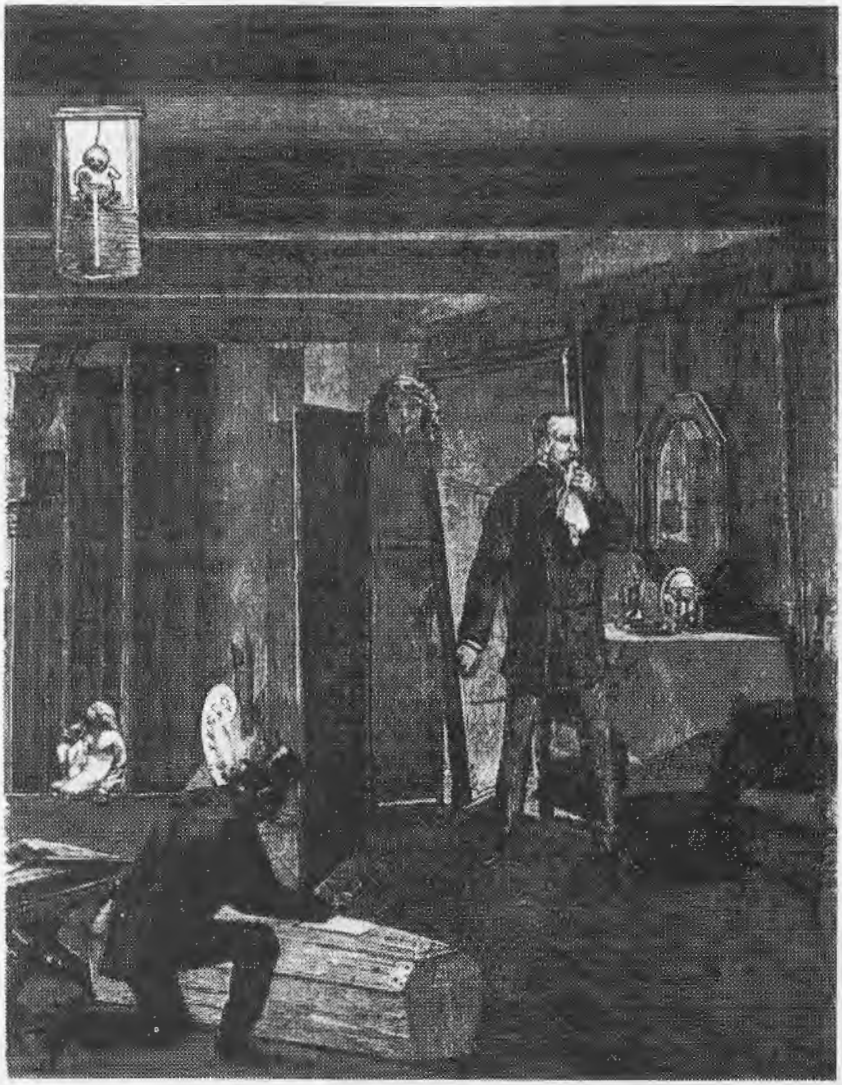


Night screams in her lair and approaches our eyes like raw flesh.

Night appeared as the oval between her legs, and revealed its indented shadow by drawing back the heavy curtains of the window. Inside, ladies wait for the screams of young women whose youth is boiled out of them on stoves meant for stew. Supple doctors listen as her stomach gurgles the familiar passing of stones that mark old age as they drop.

. . .and the third time missed.

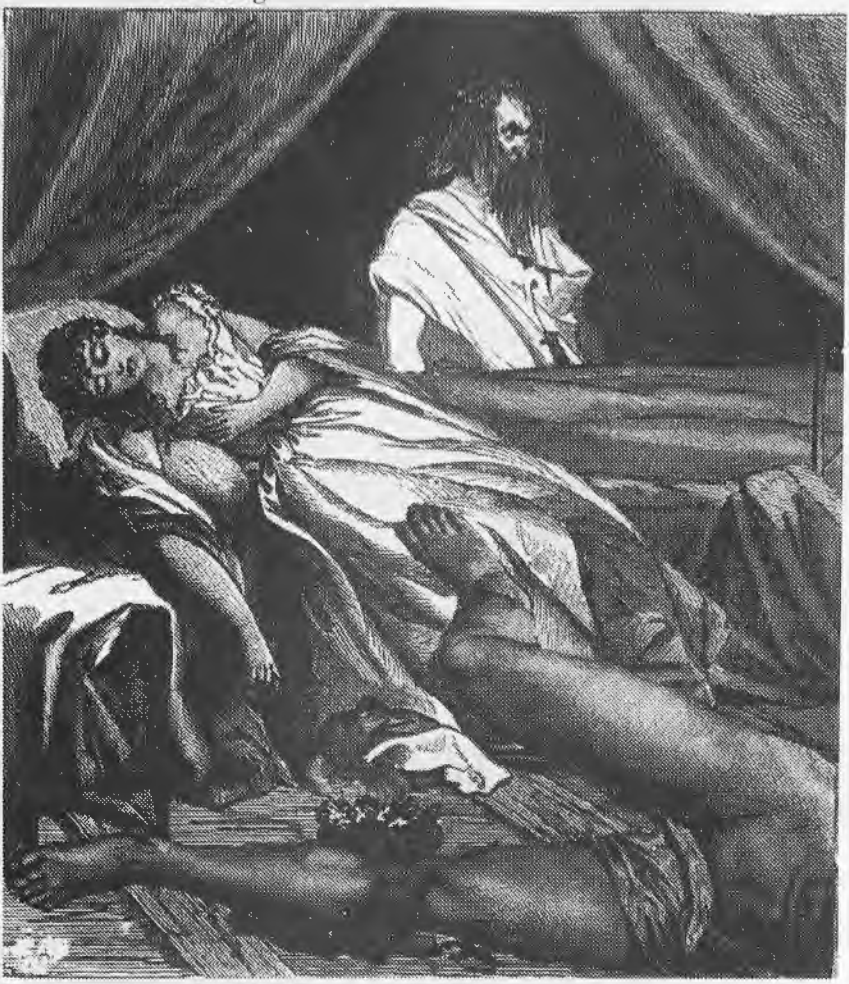
(Legs outstretched the plywood box in spite of the screaming. [Devised by two men who needed the baby without the woman.] In their cellar they channeled currents of light strong enough to stir eggs from her invisible torso.)



A scream of large diameter stifles the fruit and the pieces of meat in the coffin.

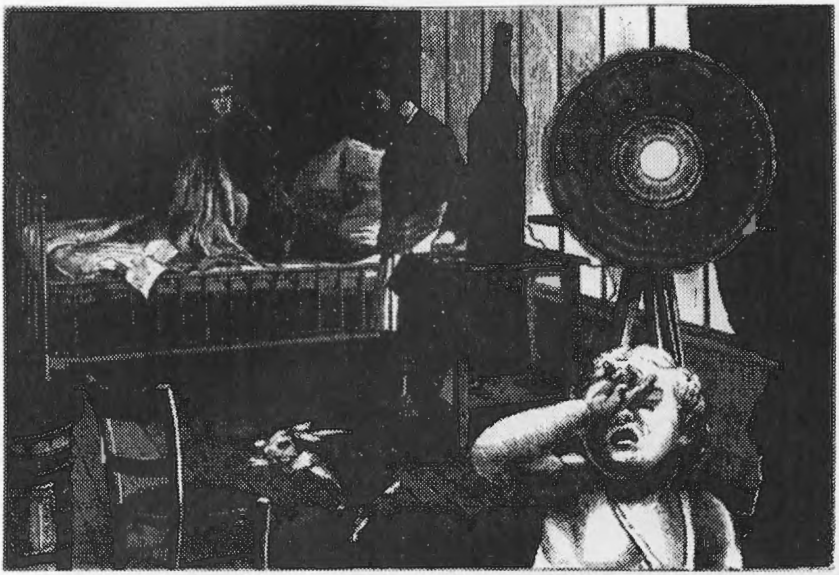
"Never mind the bolts!" said one man to another, "she is dead and in her coffin so we cannot be accused of murder." But the door knobs with their lion ears and the lamps lit with infant oils saw everything and warned the fruit to keep its rotting smell to itself.

3. The Water Breaking



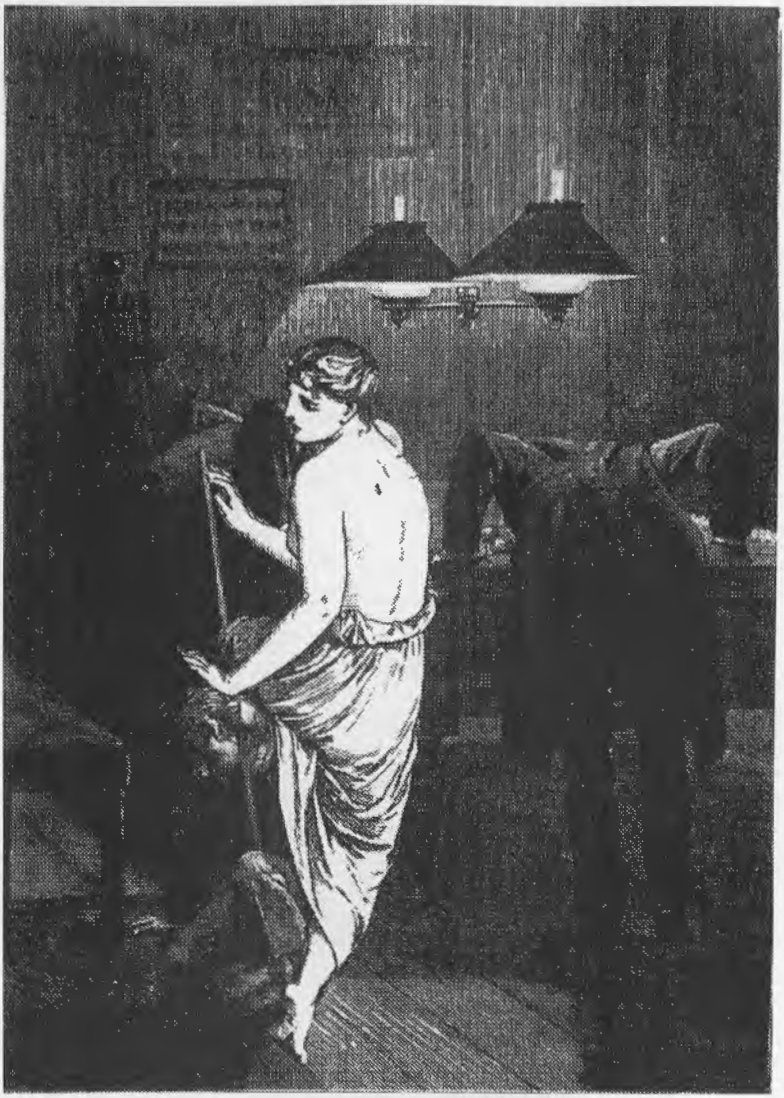
The hundred headless woman will even smile in her sleep in order that Loplop will smile at the phantoms.

(Puzzled, the pieces threw themselves into the saw that seared between his thighs. She fainted at the sight of so many fragments, for she thought her mind was frazzled. Luckily, it was just the world, crumbling around her.)



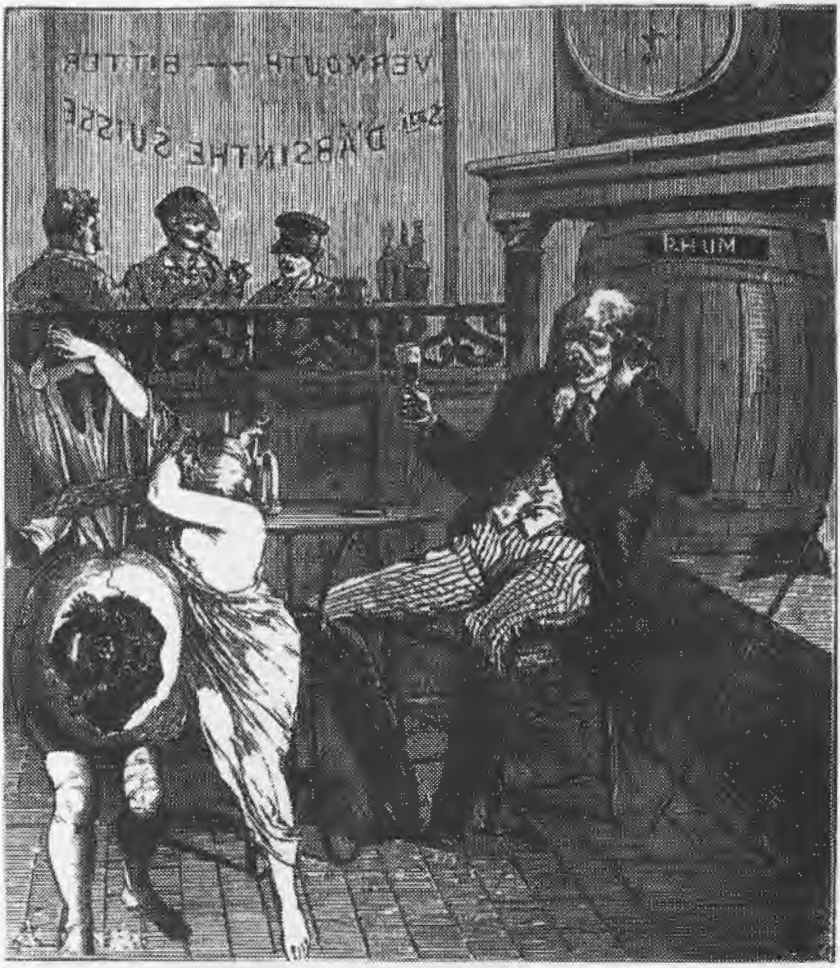
A might-have-been Immaculate Conception.

His birth was not unusual, but left behind the horrors of its emergence and threatened to pre-occupy him for the remainder of his days. If his mother had not used his crib for her stirrups, the bell-boy would not have been present to calm her contractions. If the bell-boy was a magician in disguise, then the rabbit would not have popped the cork and set the placenta free. To the child who fears the closed-in kisses of old women, the wheel of destiny will always be spun by a sun making shadows from the bars of clamped windows.



Continuation of morning, twilight and night games.

The men bent their sticks into telescopes to see if the phantom was hiding at the bottom of the center pocket. From the sleeping baby, obsessed with its shadow, she emerged, ready to cue the men through their arses. "Look for the ghosts in your own hole, sire," she said, "and use not the eight ball to disguise your desire."



Continuation.

At the billiard's club:

Rum gives the illusion of two phantoms struggling.

One stiff statue holds tight the white linen around her.

The pregnant harp gives birth to a tortoise.

Struggling, the night cuts lines into the woodwork.

The statue pulls the string and breaks the egg.

Credit: © 1996 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SPADEM / Adagp, Paris.

"SENTENCE NOT SENTENCE"

Steve McCaffery, *The Cheat of Words* (Toronto: ECW Press).
Tom Raworth, *Clean & Well Lit: Selected Poems 1987-1995* (New York: Roof Books).
Susan Howe, *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979* (New York: New Directions).
Vincent Bugliosi, *Outrage: The Five Reasons why O. J. Simpson got away with Murder* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co.)

When the O. J. Simpson verdict came in, I wept. I was on the plane between Los Angeles and San Jose (my weekly run up to Stanford) when the pilot gave us the news. No one around me seemed to react. Maybe I took it so hard because I had followed the case so closely and was (or rather, am) convinced that there wasn't a doubt in the world that Simpson had committed the double murder. Maybe it was the immediacy of it all, given that I live a few minutes' drive from Rockingham Road, regularly drive down Bundy past the "crime scene," and have dined a number of times at the now notorious Mezzaluna on San Vicente Blvd. Or maybe I cried because the trial and its discourses were such living proof of the debasement of language in *fin de siècle* America.

What's language got to do with it? What power is contained in such meter-making arguments as "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit?" Well, given that, as Vincent Bugliosi's devastating *Outrage* reminds us, the evidence against Simpson was absolutely overwhelming, the case may well have been "lost," not primarily, as is the common wisdom, because the defense played the "race card," or because "a predominantly black jury won't convict a black defendant," but because the rhetoric of the trial—the packaged language games and misuse of simple sentences and proposi-

tions to which we were all treated by the judge, the attorneys for both sides, as well as by the scandal-driven media, stood in the way of any sort of reasoned analysis.

Take the assumption that "police brutality" and "police framing" are equivalent, an assumption cynically put forward by the defense, never refuted by the prosecution, and quickly parrotted by the media. The former, as Bugliosi notes, is par for the course in the LA ghetto, where white policemen regularly harrass black citizens. Policy brutality is an outrage and it should be severely punished. But the latter, if we accept the Random House dictionary definition of "framing" as "incriminating an *innocent* person through the use of false evidence, information, etc.," is extremely rare because it is extremely difficult and dangerous: if a police officer, much less a group of officers is found guilty of a frame-up, the death penalty is a real possibility. And, as *Outrage* demonstrates step by step, there was no way for even the despicable Mark Fuhrman to enlist the dozen other officers at the crime scene in the particular frame-up the LAPD ostensibly performed. Further: there is not a shred of evidence that a frame-up had occurred, the police having, on the contrary, covered up for Simpson The Celebrity for years. Indeed, the defense attorneys never dared to assert that Simpson actually *had been* framed. Insinuation was quite enough, the media soon referring sagely to "the LAPD plot to incriminate Mr. Simpson," and so on. Thus, when Johnnie Cochran declared in his summation that the jury must return a "Not-Guilty" verdict so as to stop the Mark Fuhrmans of the world, with the fighting words, "If you don't stop it, *then who*?," there was no objection from the media or from the public even though the question is utterly absurd. In what possible sense could the twelve jurors in question "stop" police brutality or racism in America by finding O. J. Simpson not guilty? The answer is that they had no such power at all. Indeed, a year after the trial, racism is probably more rather than less pervasive: witness the church burnings in the South and the new "militias" in Montana and Arizona. As Bugliosi remarks acidly, the real question the jurors should have been asked was "If Mr. Simpson didn't commit these murders, *then who*?"

These are just small details in a complicated network of language crimes (another is the term "dream team," invented by the media, perpetuated by one and all, and in fact, as Bugliosi shows, quite contrary to the facts) that characterized the Simpson trial. A word or phrase is used by an attorney (and the prosecution was by no means better than the defense in this regard), the media circus picks it up, the talking heads like Gerry Spence and Leslie Abrahmson comment sagely on it, and next thing you know, it is accepted as the truth without the slightest resort to logic or simple common sense. Thus the claim that "It was probably the Columbia Drug Lords," was regularly heard by guests on *Larry King Live* and similar

programs, without any consideration that it would be preposterous for Central American hit men (who almost always use guns) to stab their unknown victim (presumably Nicole Simpson) seven times and break her neck. In the context of the brutal butcherings (Goldman was stabbed thirty times on his scalp, face, neck, chest, abdomen, and left thigh), "Columbia drug lords" (or "Columbia necklace") is no more than a linguistic chip, designating sleazy, dark, unknown people from "down there," who must be the ones who kill "our" citizens "up here."

The "trial of the century" has been much on my mind in the course of reading the new books just published (I am writing in July 1966) by Susan Howe, Steve McCaffery, and Tom Raworth, all of them so-to-speak language poets *avant la lettre*, their first (small press or broadside) books dating back to the early seventies or, in Raworth's case, even earlier. Despite obvious differences as to gender, age (McCaffery is ten years younger than Howe and Raworth), nationality (Howe is Irish-American, Raworth, English; McCaffery English-born but a resident of Canada since 1968), and temperament, here are three poets who have assiduously tested the limits of language, foregrounding the materiality of writing rather than its communication of specific meanings. At the same time— and here the poets in question differ from most of their younger followers— all three write very much within the English (and in Howe's case American) literary tradition: at every turn, their poems echo, allude to, and parody earlier poetic models. But all three are also highly aware of living in a culture that has been reinvented by the electronic media, a culture in which language functions as the sort of tic we find in Johnnie Cochran's "If you don't stop it, *then who*?" Thus titles like *The Cheat of Words* (McCaffery), *Frame Structures* (Howe), and *Clean & Well Lit* (Raworth).

The Cheat of Words carries on Steve McCaffery's ambitious project (its most recent installments were the long prose texts in *The Black Debt* [1989] and *Theory of Sediment* [1991]) to challenge what he has called "fenestrational necessity, a mandate to linguistic transparency though which all beings and events [are] forced to pass," or again, a "neutral ground of language" as "uninterrupting sediment of support and an un-differentiated surface upon which events are ordered." Such "ordering," McCaffery would argue, is specious to begin with, given the inherent "shiftiness" of language and the refusal of meaningful phrases to take their appointed place inside a set of coherent structures, into monological messages like "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit." Hence the poet's predilection for figures like the Deleuzian *rhizome* (the structure in which every node can be connected with every other node, allowing for the possibility of contradictory inferences) and the *Klein worm*—"a form which differs from conventional geometric forms in its characteristic absence of both inner and outer surfaces" (NI 20).

The refusal of "transparency" is not just some form of willful obscurantism or rhetorical one-up-manship: "the project," as Charles Bernstein puts it, "is to wake us from the hypnosis of absorption." It is such hypnosis, after all, from which the prosecutors were evidently suffering when they made no more than a half-hearted effort to refute the defense's claim that the blood in the white Bronco may have been planted, even though Simpson himself had admitted, in his original taped deposition (see Appendix A in *Outrage*), that he "dripped blood" in his car, home, and driveway the night of the murder. To confront this hyper-absorption, in McCaffery's lexicon, is to produce a poetic response like "Writing a Sand Thinking":

> After the gossip one returns to grammar.
> Almost to say that speech
> compares us
> renting that as a fact the case stands firm
> for what we own.
> Pragma
> by relations instance this as
> the index of my slab. Your
> slap at it.
> The clouds pastiche *aubade*
> Sid's bakery delivers symmetry
> inside an adult formula for
> Saturdays. Our poppies
> in history.
>
> (*The Cheat of Poetry*, p. 31)

Writing in the sand is, of course, one of the oldest metaphors for erasure, for that which is forgotten or lost. McCaffery's title suggests that a lot of what passes for "thinking" is equally "losable." In his fourteen-line poem, a pastiche sonnet in which no two lines are the same length, nothing "rhymes" with anything else, and enjambment is the rule, the only end-stopped line is the comically alliterating and portentous opening, "After the gossip one returns to grammar," which brings to mind Wallace Stevens's meditative lines, "After the leaves have fallen, we return / To a plain sense of things." For McCaffery, there is never a "plain sense of things." Gossip tries to get at what happened to whom, but its referentiality is by definition specious (i.e., "it's only gossip"), which is why Wittgenstein declared that "All that is not gas is grammar." For grammar, the way sentences are actually constructed, is amenable to examination. Speech, by contrast "compares us," which is dangerous, confusing "rent[al]" (borrowed words?) with

ownership. And "Pragma" (the diminutive of "pragmatics," in the sense of edicts, ordinances of state) try to define "this as / the index of my slab." What slab? Is it the poet's index finger? The "slab" of *Philosophical Investigations*, where it functions in the most elementary of language games? However we characterize it, "you" "slap at it." And why not, given all those shared phonemes: "slab"/ "slap"? Who "owns" these words, anyway?

An "aubade" is a dawn song, usually expressing the lovers' regret that the night has passed so quickly and that they must separate. If it's cloudy, though, daylight may not yet be perceivable, and so "The clouds pastiche aubade." Instead of impending separation, the "adult formula" for this Saturday morning prescribes mealtime. "Sid's bakery delivers," providing "symmetry" to our lives and relegating sleep (poppies) to history.

If I have indulged in a somewhat labored reading of what is a delightfully playful poem, it is in order to suggest that, contrary to the still dominant view that McCaffery's poems "refuse to mean," on the contrary, this little "fourteener"—one of the slighter texts in this collection of thirty-nine poems— has a great deal "to say." It is written, to begin with, very much *in* a particular tradition: the metaphysical tradition of love sonnets and aubades, poems about our thought processes on the morning after the night before. But there is nothing "personal" or "confessional" here: no specifiers about the poet and his mistress, who may (or may not?) be present. No generalizations are being made about sex, marriage, or anything else because McCaffery is suggesting that one can't return to the "plain sense of things," only to grammar, to how it works. The poem thus demands strong reader involvement: any number of plots will fit the "adult formula" of this sand-writing / thinking. And who knows what it is that "Sid's bakery delivers"?

But why is such reader participation, such "Conjectural and sediment to emendation" (p. 43) necessary? Because it forces us to slow down and pay attention, to defamiliarize and hence call into question the way we normally process information:

> This recording was recorded live
> distance wind switched part
> a village where
> this record was recoded.
>
> ("Blue Note," p. 44)

Here McCaffery plays on such commonplaces as "broadcast live from X" (where the very act of broadcasting of course makes the performance-as-heard obviously *not* live), on "long distance" as ostensibly presenting us

with "live" voices, despite the possibility of "switch[ing] part[s]" to produce the voices of the dead, and on the claim for the ethnographic authenticity of the generic "village," even though here, as in more "civilized" settings, the record has been "recoded," that is, tampered with. In this scheme of things:

> in the direction that erections take
> this one has become a false path
>
> ("Learning Lenin," p. 56)

and the proffering of alternatives has been reduced to phrases like "Either *you* carve or it's *my* lamp" (p. 57). This sentence comes from a poem called "Discourse on Method," which is made up of one-line units, Descartes's *cogito* ("I think therefore I am") gradually modulating, via lines like "Lungs get repetitive" and "Break a neck," into "I thought therefore I was," and then "I think therefore I'll be." The mode is Wittgensteinian, a mere shift in tense or the substitution of a single word transforming a logical proposition into an absurd one.

If McCaffery's unit is the single line, often the single word with space (silence) playing an active role, Tom Raworth's poetic mode is the opposite, his unpunctuated blocks of lightly stressed short lines speeding full steam ahead, as if to say that any word or phrase can belong with any other, provided they are incorporated in the same columnar block of text or pronounced in one long breath. Raworth has been using these columns for more than a decade now (especially in the long poem *Writing*, published by The Figures in 1982), they jet across our field of vision so swiftly and yet modestly that it takes a moment to realize how intricately planned they are. Take, for example, the first fourteen lines of "Out of the Picture," the long narrative poem that opens *Clean & Well Lit*:

> the obsolete ammunition depot
> unmissed and unreported
> put it in categories
> still glistened with dampness
> suits seemed to be identical
> through the window behind him
> a battered cardboard box
> won somewhere gambling
> dim bell in his memory
> was making a duplicate
> to see if that needed explanation
> sharply, and then, more gently

the door opened
three thousand miles east of home

(p. 11)

I am arbitrarily breaking after line 14 but there is no visual, aural, or semantic break in this 199-line ticker-tape text; the "picture" (a film-script of the sort that seems to allude to war, science fiction, gangster exploits — you name it!) just coming into focus ("now that he was aware of it") as it dissolves. For such an "open" text, however, "Out of the Picture" is highly structured both phonemically and syntactically. The predominant sound of these lightly stressed "fast" lines is a short vowel sound followed by the voiceless stop *t*, as in:

the obsol*ete* ammu*nit*ion de*pot*
unmissed and unre*port*ed
put it in *cat*egories

Seven instances in eleven words (although "depot" is eye rhyme rather than consonance), the light *t* continuing all the way down the page to the last line, "*print*ed on them *suit*ed me," and then to the last line of the whole poem, "now th*at* he was aware of *it*."

Sound repetition (and there are many other patterns) is played off against what is an almost 100% rate of syntactic variation. Far from being merely random, in which case syntactic patterns would repeat, Raworth has arranged it so that no two lines in a row follow the same syntax. To exemplify briefly, the first fourteen lines above go like this:

Noun phrase with adjectival modifier
past participles used as predicate adjectives
imperative clause (or past indicative verb + adverbial compliment)
past indicative verb + prepositional phrase
complete clause (subject, verb, predicate) in past tense
prepositional phrase modified by preopositional phrase
noun phrase with adjectival modifier
past indicative verb + present participle
noun phrase + prepositional phrase
past progressive verb + object
infinitive + conditional clause
adverb + qualifier + adverb
complete clause (subject +predicate)
adverbial phrase of time

No doubt, this chart will strike many readers as pedantic, but I hope it will show the ways sameness and difference operate in Raworth's verbal scheme. A lesser poet would follow "the obsolete ammunition depot," with a series of similar noun phrases or would provide us with a continuous sentence, chopped into line lengths. Raworth's phrases, on the other hand, try to get "at" the substance of the poem from every possible angle—description, rumor, hearsay, narrative account, qualifier—even as what is missing throughout all this variability is the subject. Who or what "still glistened with dampness," "won somewhere gambling," "was making a duplicate." Where is the "obsolete ammunition depot"; where is it that "the door opened / three thousand miles east of home"? What good does it do us to be given the specifier "three thousand miles east" when we don't know where "home" is? Is it possible to bring "out" what is "in the picture"? On the one hand, the writing is descriptive: something "still glistened with dampness"; "a battered cardboard box" seems to be visible "through the window behind him" (but who is "him"?), "the door opened," and so on. But then there are the abstractions of "put it in categories" and "to see if that needed explanation." And the observation that "suits seemed to be identical" is undercut by the lack of information we have as to those suits. Whose were they? And are they suits of clothing, suits of cards, or what?

As we weigh one line against the other, however, an exciting tale seems to be emerging, rather like one of those tiny Japanese paper packets, put in water and taking shape as a flower. Is this *The Bridge on the River Kwai* or a similar film? The "ammunition depot" might well be "obsolete" in time of peace; it is logical for it to be "unmissed and unreported." But how to "put it in categories"? Perhaps inside the depot, the identical suits are found, "still glisten[ing] with dampness." And there are further testimonials like the "battered cardboard box / won somewhere gambling." Indeed, a "dim bell in his [the poet's?] memory," was "making a duplicate," which is to say, conjuring up the representation of the original to "see if that needed explanation." But then "gently / the door opened / three thousand miles east of home." Is this a reference to the past event narrated or to the present of the poet who rediscovers it? We cannot tell, but as the poem speeds ahead, more and more clues appear within the "heavy coating of dust" and "panning over rough walls." For instance, there is reference to bombings and to the "smell of wood burning," on "costumed models / back in the car then / slumped down in the seat"—the latter bringing to mind an Ed Kienholz assemblage. A taxi heads back "to avoid hysterical screaming," a woman "sob[s] / behind her veil," a guard is killed, a train "makes an unscheduled stop," a "mixture of standard tourists/ clustered around / the elegant camera bag / each holding a briefcase." And throughout, there are metapoetic references, as in "camouflaged / against

the cult of personality," "he remembered the scene . . . slightly out of focus," and "music wasn't music any more."

"Out of the Picture," like the later "Coal Grass Blood Night Emerald" (just consider the complicated relationships between those five nouns and their animal-vegetable-mineral references), is the perfect poem to read when you are tired of reportage and interviews with "live" celebrities or famed victims of one sort or another. If we can't get inside O.J.'s mind (as Chris Darden claimed to do in his opening statement about "control"), what a pleasure and challenge to enter the voyage realm of "Out of the Picture," to be transported elsewhere, without a hectoring presence that tells us what to make of this or that detail. Partitions, mirrors, "dimly lit / parking lot[s] / set well back from the road": the imagination is fired. When "a train makes an unscheduled stop / he'd never heard before / suppressing an urge to look back for. . ." the object of "look back for" turns out to be, quite inconsequentially, "something to read." In the meantime, on every rereading, "Out of the Picture" yields new nuggets of meaning. In the course of the poem, those short little "T-bar" syllables like *jet* and *shot* come together, making us aware of the darkness they enmesh.

If McCaffery's poetic unit is what the Russian Futurists called "the word as such," and Raworth's might be characterized as the propulsion of non-stop verbal flow, Susan Howe's is more properly collage. "Frame Structures," the title of her new book as well as of its thirty-page Preface, refers to the "framing" the poet has provided for her four earliest books, originally published as chapbooks or small press volumes. They are *Hinge Picture* (Telephone Books, 1974), *Chanting the Crystal Sea* (Fire Exit, 1975), *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (Telephone Books, 1978), and *Cabbage Gardens* (Fathom Press, 1979)[3]. Between these four works and the present of *Frame Structures*, nearly twenty years have elapsed, recognition having come to Howe only gradually, beginning in the mid-eighties with the warm reception given to *My Emily Dickinson*.

The early volumes remind us of that Howe started out as a visual artist. In *Hinge Picture*, for example, the epigraph comes from Duchamp's notes for the *Green Box*: "Perhaps make a HINGE PICTURE. . . . develop in space the PRINCIPLE OF THE HINGE in the displacements 1st in the plane 2nd in space." That principle stands behind the sequence's visual layout: again and again, Howe discovers the paragrams within words by forcing her found texts (primarily from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and* Fall) into rectangular units with justified left and right margins. In #1, for example, "intellect" is broken up into "intelle" and "ct," "hieroglyph" into "h" and "ieroglyph," each letter thus receiving special attention. And in *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, the title (derived, minus the word "Secret," from William Byrd's eighteenth-century journal of explorations in the Virginia wilderness) appears as a mirror image (see p. 94), even as the

opening horizontal rectangles (again with justified left and right margins and double spacing) play on the word "MARK":

> mark mar ha forest 1 a boundary manic a land a tract indicate position 2 record bunting interval free also event starting the slightly position of O about both of don't something INDICATION Americ
>
> made or also symbol sachem maimed as on her for ar in teacher duct excellent figure MARK lead be knife knows his hogs dogs a boundary model nucle hearted land land land district boundary times un
>
> (p. 89)

Here *mark* refers first of all to the surveyor's (William Byrd's) mark made in delineating a boundary between "tract[s]" of forest land. But the mark is also a trace, a sign that points us to specific things that have happened: one thinks of Blake's "London," with its lines, "And mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe." The poem's opening "Mark mar ha forest 1 a boundary manic" treats the word "mark" to its paragrammatic possibilities: "mar ha" may be separate words, referring to destruction and the exclamation of surprise, but then again, the two units may be part of the name "Martha," the "t" missing in the imagined source manuscript. Here and throughout the text, "boundary manic" is central to the poet's thought; she is mesmerized by questions of "secret" divisions, borders, boundaries, fault lines. "MARK," we read on p. 90, "border / bulwark, an object set up to indicate a boundary or position / hence a sign or token / impression or trace / The Horizon." Then, too, "Mark" refers both to Howe's father (Mark de Wolfe Howe) and to her son, as the dedication on page 91 tells us. Indeed, the frontispiece informs us that Mark DeWolfe Howe's *Touched With Fire: The Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Harvard University Press, 1947) is the poem's primary source.

But—and this is what makes *Frame Structures* so intriguing—within the configuration of the new preface, the *mark-ing* or trace structure of *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, far from being incorporated into the larger frame of the new book, are always qualifying and transforming statements made in the prose memoir. Indeed, there is no external "frame," no outside to contain the inside of the poems. Howe's autobiographical memoir begins as a kind of feminist variant of Robert Lowell's "91 Revere St."—a portrait of the artist as New England blue-blood, neurotic child. "On Sunday, December 7, 1941," we read, "I went with my father to the zoo in Delaware Park" (p. 3). The father, who is about to go to war, is not named and unlike Lowell, Howe does not give us a continuous narrative about

persons and places. Rather, she shifts in the very next section to Colonial American history, specifically to the 1792 purchase by the Holland Land Company of the "wild lands" in central and western parts of New York and Pennsylvania. The references to the "land speculators, surveyors, promoters, publicists," who settled in upper western New York State and founded the city of Buffalo, where Howe was born (and where she is once again living as a professor at SUNY) are spliced into the "secret history" of William Byrd's explorations in Virginia a century earlier, the two narratives overlapping as parts of the larger tale of boundary-making, acquisitiveness, plunder, and war that characterized the newly formed "United States" for its inception.

But Howe never says this directly. Indeed her Preface provides no overt background material about the four early books reprinted by New Directions, the conditions under which they were written, how they were conceived, and so on. For such information, we may go to the Howe interviews in *The Difficulties* (1989) and *Talisman* (1992). In *Frame Structures*, the "evidence" for the poetry is accumulated obliquely and indirectly, the unnamed "my father" of Howe's opening pages—the "Daddy" who went away to war— only emerging as Mark DeWolfe Howe half-way through the narrative, where he reappears as one of Felix Frankfurter's disciples at Harvard Law School and later his and Dean Ernest Griswold's choice to produce the edition of Oliver Wendell Holmes's letters and diary that became Susan Howe's source in *Secret History of the Dividing Line*. We now learn that the sequel to this book, *Touched with Fire*, was called *The Proving Years* (1963), and that its first chapter is titled "'The Stars and the Plough' probably because that's the title of *The Plough and the Stars*. Sean O'Casey's play about the Easter Rising, named for the symbol on the flag of the Irish citizen army, is one of my mother's favorites. The stars are the ideal the plough reality. I guess my father meant to put reality first" (p. 17).

The anecdote nicely embodies the poet's heritage as she perceives it: the idealistic radicalism she derived from her Irish actress mother, Mary Manning, vis-à-vis the more tempered, scholarly historical imagination of her father Mark. But instead of now moving ahead chronologically, as would most autobiographers, Howe goes back in time, to her paternal grandfather, the antiquarian, Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, her great-grandfather by the same name who was a distinguished Episcopal Bishop, and, beyond these two Mark Antonys, to the early d'Wolf (the original name) and Howe ancestors who were "generally sea captains, privateers, slave traders," one having fought in King Philip's War, another, James d'Wolf, evidently having thrown "a female African slave overboard during the Middle Passage because she was sick with smallpox." "When this

murderous ancestor could finally afford to buy his own slave ship, he christened her *Sukey*. Sukey is my nickname" (pp. 20-21).

How does the late twentieth-century radical woman poet deal with these events in her distant and not-so-distant past? "Space," the narrator remarks at one point, "is a frame we map ourselves in" (p. 9). At certain junctures, and especially toward the end of "Frame Structures," the formal narrative begins to break down. The poet as surveyor-excavator, working "where logic and mathematics meet the materials of art. Canvas, paper, pencil, color, frame, title," refigures a page from Benjamin Franklin's *Memoirs* (p. 27), lines running into one another and produced as overprint, the technique Steve McCaffery discusses so interestingly in his essay on Bill Bissett in *North of Intention*. "The essential part of any invention," we read on Howe's penultimate page, "is distance and connectness. We pass each other pieces of paper. A sheet of paper, a roll of film, the frame structure. Conceptual projects of the 1960s and 1970s combined windows, mirrors, garbage, photographs, video, dance, tape recordings, rope, steel, yarn, nails, cars, machines, just about anything." (p. 28). Just so, when we now turn back to *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, individual passages emerge as "overprinted" with new significations, as in the case of the 26-line word column on p. 119, at the center of which we find

in time
MARK
border
bulwark
detail

How can we tell the framing from the framed? In the "Cinder of the lexical drift" which is the "secret history" of "Frame Structures," every "dividing line" is submitted to further development and variation. This, the poet implies, is how "evidence" should actually be weighed and tested. For no frame can account for all the pieces in the puzzle ("it is hard to know where to begin," as we read on the last page of Howe's Preface), but the text's intricate interplay, its metonymic network of *marks* and traces, calls into question such discourses as that of the postmodern courtroom, as well as of the verbal world that mediates it for us. "If it doesn't fit / you must acquit": can the "fit" game Simpson put on for the jury really function as such an isolated instance? And where is the "dividing line" between "may" and "must"?

In an interview with Clint Burnham, McCaffery makes a case against the hackneyed designation of radical poetries as being "experimental":

> Experimental suggests (perhaps implies) a scientific model and an enterprise based on trial and error. This metaphoric implication further allows the disvalidation of works as "having failed." But trial, error, failure and success are totally inappropriate to these cultural productions. A better term might be "exploratory" evoking a spatial rather than scientific metaphor.[4]

That spatial metaphor also animates Raworth's vertical word columns and Howe's "frame structures." The "displacements" of the Duchampian "hinge picture," "1st in the plane 2d in space," force us to rethink those facile buzzwords and clichés that permeate the culture. To put it in the context of Simpson-speak, if it doesn't fit, explore the hand inside the glove, and see what that cut on the middle finger may tell you.

Notes

1 Steve McCaffery, "And Who Remembers Bobby Sands?" (1985), in *North of Intention: Critical Writings* 1973–86 (New York: Roof Books, 1986), p. 39. This book is subsequently cited in the text as NI.
2 Charles Bernstein, "Artifice of Absorption," *A Poetics* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 54.
3 In her Author's Note, Howe explains that *Cabbage Gardens* was written before *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, although published subsequently.
4 Clint Burnham, "An Interview with Steve McCaffery, *Witz* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 3.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

Jim Brodey, *Heart of the Breath (Poems 1979-1992)*, edited by Clark Coolidge (Hard Press, 1996), ISBN 0-9638433-7-0, $17.95

This should be the season to re-evaluate the poets of the New York School, with large recent books, new and old, by Notley, Mayer, Waldman, Ceravolo, Padgett, Ashbery, Koch, Guest, Myles, Schuyler, many others, and with the impending release by Don Allen of a new edition of O'Hara's *Standing Still and Walking in New York*—not to mention the unveiling of O'Hara as "the" white poet of racial politics at the recent Orono Conference in Maine. And here comes Jim Brodey's selected late poems, edited by

Clark Coolidge, in a volume beautifully produced by Hard Press, with a short biographical preface by John Godfrey.

I met Jim Brodey about four years ago, at Small Press Traffic, the bookstore here in San Francisco where sometimes I worked as a volunteer. I remember him coming in, terribly gaunt, stripped-down steel muscle moving—but no more gaunt or lesioned than any of the thousands of gay men who live with HIV in San Francisco. I didn't know he had AIDS until he told me so, and he asked me for money, the proceeds of his books. I explained that the store carried none of his books. He got angry. But that faded fast. It was raining. He pulled up a chair and sat down, his back to me, staring at the spines of the available books and recounting his history with their writers. I was thinking about the Brodey legend—the man who came to dinner, the wild garrulous man, the man who claimed to have first brought Janis Joplin—or was it Joni Mitchell?—to orgasm. After awhile he slipped away. The posthumous publication of Jim Brodey's last poems reveals a poet rather different than the fellow I met. It is a clear illustration, were one needed, of how a great gift sometimes transcends the needs and fractures of the body or mind.

What might crack writing look like? How does addiction manifest itself inside the word, a bulletin from the frazzled ecstatic synapses? The short, bitten-off line, and staggered drop of the poems of "Panda Heart" might give a clue. Coolidge's note reveals that Brodey might have written almost 1,100 of these pieces—ten stanzas of three lines each—inside of two years. Wow! That's a lot of triads, and each piece is named after an absent friend or guitar hero—"Robert Johnson," "Duane Allman," "Joan Mitchell," "Ted Berrigan," "Ron Padgett." Then there's "Paul Violi 3," "Ed Dorn 4," "Fred Frith 6." How ever did Coolidge choose among so many names and bumps? The joint is jumping. "Abdicating the throne of downtown clown/ Shoot some deliciousness/ into a warm mouth" (286). In hindsight the precipitous ecstasy of free thought—the free zone of writing—seems to bring with it a weather of disaster, a low pressure range, but astonishingly *Heart of the Breath* is an overwhelmingly serene book: Philip Whalen with a glass pipe jammed in his mouth, high thoughts crackling like popping corn, rich like melting butter.

There are some clinkers—a cute invocation to John Ashbery—"Let our champagne/ Be a bowl of Jujyfruits/ A wave a curtsy a bow"—can you imagine? Or the sentimental New Age salute to Bob Kaufman: "A living saint/ Given to vibration/ Of the world soul/ / Enriched our planet/ In his gentleness/ And bombastic word-wit" (197). However, Brodey's own bombastic word-wit gives tremendous zip and drive to a long, long book, and culminates in a series of ecstatic, dreamy stanzas called "There and Back." In this ultimate sequence the poet looks forward to a future, a death that includes meeting once again Berrigan, Schuyler, O'Hara, Denby

"[b]ack into the light/ where the mind moves/ and is beautiful as a poem/ if that poem were writ right."

—KEVIN KILLIAN

SPECTERS AND SPECTACLES

Joseph Donahue's *World Well Broken* (Talisman House, 1995. $9.95) is the tongue's slip under the heel of "words well spoken": language's "oracular chaff" in junk diaspora where sacred and profane rub elbows, tense as a Rabin-Arafat handshake. Donahue has a knack for high-jolt juxtapositions, the "voluptuous crucifixion" between the quotidian and oracular, "the cross / & the tourbus distributor cap"(5). Medical images of x-ray charts, blood vials, and "Fluorescent planetary glow / of the children's wing" (19) mingle with "pentecostal char"(22) and Skylab fallout, as if Donne donned scrubs, proclaiming "Christ Enters Manhattan":

> The strikebound & fluorescent
> eternities of Intensive Care. Ghostly gowns.
> Families loiter. Tattooed & helpless, a father in a black jacket
> . . .
>
> So unlit a limbo. Light and Shadow mix and unmix.
> Bulbs flutter above instruments & bed. . .
> Alert to its limit, the soul jolts. . .
>
> (40)

Donahue's writing has a speculative edge that's refreshing: the poem as something to learn from, locus of inquiry and verve. And yet, the work steers clear of prescriptive solutions with a sort of Eliotic pessimism: the worlds revolve "well broken." In "The Age of Oracles," Dante's "fiery flower" is set against "a poster on the wall, a drug company promo"(6). Is this, then, our prozac paradiso, "Rose of the hour, a / blossoming narcotic. The annunciation, a list of chemicals. The narrative / of salvation, a description of how the chemicals combine, and deaden / the nerves, and block out the waves of pain" (6)?

Despite an apocalyptic tone that veers, at times, toward cosmic imagery overkill, *World Well Broken* bridges the spectacle and specter of "human," asking in incantational anaphors "what?" to our "sentiment / in the sequence of numbers"(21), our overabundances and desperations a grotesquery not unlike Dante's ring of sloth, or deeper where "the told, the whispered, the written, the imagined, the revealed, are also / lost, are bodies, are less than bodies, are finally only faces, faces in hell, / faces frozen in the ice of a downward path"(29). Unlike Dante, the face we kick may be our own.

Spencer Selby's *Malleable Cast* (Generator Press, 1995. $10.00) is a playful, often humorous collection of 72 image-poems: texts (philosophical rants, a fictional narrative rife with archaisms, discourses on mental illness, truth, desire, death) superimposed on images (circa '50s photographs of industry and leisure, alchemical illustrations, manual icons and diagrams). The written texts move in and out of the visual templates like graffiti through a subway window, appearing and disappearing in peek-aboo style. A conventional "read" is not possible; and so: how "read"; or what, then, is "reading"?

I found myself not reading, per se, but looking at the written texts as integral parts of each image—visual fields playing around the edges of linguistic signs, and vice-versa, in train-and-tunnel style. I saw a pun cast in the "arm cast" image-poem (#11, unpaginated): the word "Duchamp," like the broken arm in advance of the artist's snow shovel ready-made. And is that a spoof on Pound's "book" as a "ball of light in one's hands" in image-poem #22?

The texts interact with the images as both material and mold (the broader definition of "cast"), questioning the relationships between verbal and visual signs: how they interact; how we construct meaning from various media; and how we define text and context, information and medium.

It's easy to smirk at some of the images Selby has selected, especially the naive tributes to American industry and leisure. But the written texts speak to something still "unresolved" within the images they accompany. Like Saussure's axes of language, it's as if what's being signified in these written texts is an historical continuity under the images' temporal specificity. Within the "margins" of an illustrated woman (standing before a made-up bed, a pillow pressed to her chemise), we read: "ed or / ly conne / are neith / cycle o / rts of form and app / energy, the world lives / sh ttered by chance. / senseless unravellin / ruled by abso" (#56, unpaginated). Both world and word are "sh(a)ttered by chance." The "senseless unravellin(g)" could be merely implying something about the bed, the human makings and unmakings, ravellings and unravellings; or the attempt at "unravelling"

meaning from a text "shattered by chance." And yet something spectral hovers between these atavistic images and their persistence in the wor(l)d.

Barbara Henning's *Love Makes Thinking Dark* (United Artist Books, 1995, $7.00.): a linguistic funhouse of prose and verse poems where body, language, memory, family/pronoun romance and specklings of body/text speculations merge and undercut, informing and undermining each urgent declarative.

One of the more interesting facets of the poems is Henning's pronouns that flip-flop gender and case as speedily as her fields of reference shift: "I accidently encounter her asleep naked. / (He always makes me laugh.) She teaches me / to cook. The familiar metaphoric feeling / begins to fade . . ."(7).

Henning's keen use of metonyms, mock-couplets, prose blockstyle, internal linebreaks, graphics, quirky capitalization, elliptical syntax, and periods as grammatical torques keeps the poems' semantic floorboards in wobble. Note how each line, linearly unconnected, metonymically telescopes into the next:

> My sister's body mostly water
> The seams in the human skull
> Angular becomes rounded
> Brooklyn via Dekalb
> Between the tracks
> in a flowered skirt
> the uneven sound of rain
>
> (26)

"Fabric Reins" is an exhilarating example of loosing language via form's constraint. A range of images and phrases recycle throughout the piece, shifting through oulipo-like twists and grammatical transpositions that dynamize an ostensibly simple sequence of events: "A strobe spins light on the girl's black velvet skirt and high/ heels. She stands in the middle of a ballroom, listens to Lorraine / talk about the man who used to tie her up with satin ribbons"(62). Four paragraph-stanzas later: "A strobe spins light on the girl's black velvet skirt and high / heels. A stroke spins a light emitting diode on Gisarme's black / velvet skivvy and high Hegelians. She stands in the middle of a / ballroom, in the middle distance of baloney, near the balm of / Gilead, listening to Lorraine talk about the man who used to tie her up with satin ribbons"(64).

Henning's writing is strongest while operating within this sort of language-motley, the poem's reins pulled tight and loosed in stitch-&-patch pastiche that intersects its own semantic plane: "Baloney" under the

"ballroom," "Hegelians" under the "heels," specters under the spectacle of words.

—DAN FEATHERSTON

Architectural Eros

For years I have mused upon a witticism, perhaps faultily attributed in my memory to Oscar Wilde: "Eroticism is but a matter of lighting." Deciding to write on eroticism and architecture, I thought that this decadent fin-de-siècle quip might be a promising point of departure. Furthermore, I expected that two recent publications on utopias would provide additional clues. I was thwarted, though, by an epistemological asceticism not uncommon to contemporary theory. Despite the many virtues of *Public* #12, "Utopias," it was of no help, for its eroticism was not architectural and its architecture not erotic. As for the provocative and innovative *Lusitania* #7, "Sites and Stations: Provisional Utopias," a detail in the editorial cartoon sums up my frustration. At the corner of a desolate moonscape, the pointed weapon of an armored vehicle penetrates a biomorphic form; the caption reads: "The only sex in this book." A subsequent perusal of books on utopia was also fruitless, as I failed to find a major realized *post*lapsarian erotic architecture. Eden, the archetype for utopia, was fissured by the advent of conscious eroticism, to become eternally impenetrable. Through a compensatory though restrictive nostalgia, Eros was henceforth relegated to landscape architecture, to the art of gardens. The dream of a perfect rusticity—as exemplified in works such as the Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* [1499; The Dream of Poliphilus], where architecture exists as a decorative and symbolic adjunct to the narrative—inscribes an incontrovertibly pragmatic limit to the myth of Eros. How is it that we have not situated a contemporary culture of erotic utopia?

Culture is constituted by sublimation, by detours of libidinal drives, such that eroticism is sexuality transfigured by language. Eroticism is not an attribute or determination: it is the very form of human existence, the articulation of the body and the symbolic. Thus all economy is libidinal economy, wherein the ideal staging of desire necessitates an Ovidian scenario of transformation and metamorphosis, where the potentiality and virtuality of polymorphously perverse bodies reveal manifold destinies.

The libido is characterized by fluidity, transience and heterogeneity, a malleable Eros linking us with what Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers to as "Being in promiscuity," where the ancient ontological notion of Being is provocatively redefined as "flesh." Since the body uses its parts as a system of symbols for the world, any object may enter the matrix of sexuality, every word possesses an erotic valence, every narrative is driven by a libidinal charge. Eros insinuates himself into every situation: the mere generalities of convexity and concavity suffice to attract libido. And yet, the architectural evidence of this is extremely rare, with its major instance being the symbolic relations between icon and support in the Paleolithic parietal art of the European caves.

Utopia implies a finite spatial or systemic closure which permits an infinite affective or imaginative openness. The fixed nature of any icon, architectural or otherwise, is always perturbed by the openended variability of the narratives to which it is susceptible. The architectural icon is sublated, often effaced, in perverse, aberrant and *abnormal* stagings of the theater of desire, where the traumas, enigmas and joys of sexuality are abreacted and narrated. Such mutability would seem to be antithetical to the inherent solidness of architecture, suggesting a paradox at the core of any utopianism. Architectural erotics evinces the contradictory need for a public, communal, utilitarian, mercantile, statistically determined realm (for example, the variegated yet stereotyped erotics of the brothel) *and* a private, solipsistic, phantasmatic, fetishistic, idiosyncratic domain (the quotidian counter-architectural darkness of the bedroom.)

One resolution to this problem, however improbable, would be an architecture which exists *as* narrative. This is precisely the case in Jean-François de Bastide's *The Little House,* where the co-protagonist in a tale of erotic seduction is an 18th century *maison de plaisance,* epitomizing what Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* celebrates as the topophilia of "felicitous space." Where there is architecture there is light: as dusk descends, the seducer Trémicour leads the innocent Mélite into the exquisite salon where, "These thirty candles reflected in the mirrors, and this added brilliance made the salon seem larger and restated the object of Trémicour's impatient desires."[1] Later, on a narrow garden path, a well orchestrated cannon shot throws Mélite into the Marquis's arms, at which point, as he holds her tightly, "Affronted by this intimate gesture, she was about to free herself with equal vivacity when the sudden flash of fireworks revealed in the reckless man's eyes a deep and submissive love." (92) Here, light is an expedient—somewhat on the erotico-ontological level of chocolate or alcohol—rather than a symbolic form. While the "little house" is perhaps ideal, it is hardly utopian in the strict sense of the term: it proffers but one fantasy, one narrative, one architecture, one seduction.

In contradistinction, Anthony Vidler suggests in his Preface to *The Little House* that in both Sade and Fourier, "the fiction of 'architecture' as traditionally understood, was dropped in favor of an art of endless mechanical manipulation of space—a kind of literal parallel to the mechanization of eroticism in their texts through repetition and systematization." (15) Such architecture marks the anti-Enlightenment inauguration of a modernist erotics. Unlike delicately orchestrated libertine sites such as the "little house," the chateau of Silling in Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom* constitutes the scandalous extreme of the most radical liaisons. The apparently panoptical organization of the chateau is ultimately belied by its secret chambers, where unseeable pleasures and unspeakable horrors are enacted. These invisible, dark, unnarrated activities constitute a textual supplement which, if determinable, would totalize the erotic combinatory system. But such erotic closure is impossible, for not all things erotic have their *place:* Eros exists as the aporia between the imaginable and the unimaginable, gesture and speech, desire and act. Here the full richness and ambiguity of eroticism reigns, with all its terrors and delights. Sade wrote of spaces obscene, because haunted by death; sites fascinating, because ruled by pure metamorphosis; scenes of excess, because they necessarily extend beyond the limits of any single imagination; realms of seduction, because they permit phantasmatic projection; theaters of pornography, because of an unspeakable promiscuity; domains of transgression, because symbolic articulation is no longer possible.[2]

In Sade's erotic theatricalizations, sexuality was raised to the level of epistemology. As has often been noted, the microcosm of the chateau of Silling is a phantasmatic amalgam of prison (the Bastille) and theater (Sade's chateau at La Coste). Vidler suggests that this is a solipsistic architecture, reversing the modes of 18th century theatricality, since the staging of desire by the elite brotherhood that rules Silling conflates author, spectator and actor.[3] As the storytellers' lubricious tales inflame the masters' imaginations, the narrated scenes are forthwith enacted by the masters and their victims. Recent Sade scholarship has focused on the profound, coherent and constant theatricality of Sade's writing, where theatrical artifice informs literary style, cultural critique, and seductive technique.[4] Whence the key to our architectural paradox: in Sade, language *is* theater *is* architecture *is* eroticism. Only through this conflation of ontological realms can a truly erotic architecture exist, This "solution" was already hinted at by Roland Barthes in *Sade, Loyola, Fourier,* where he explains that in Sade the enclosure which permits the imaginary system is constituted such that its task is "to contaminate reciprocally the erotic and the rhetoric" within the subversive erotic scene, such that Sade "always sides with *semiosis* rather than *mimesis.*"[5] Barthes concludes that the Sadian city, the

Chateau of Silling, is "the sanctuary not of debauchery, but of the 'story'." (37) And yet, from the architect's point of view, cannot erotics and rhetoric in turn be "contaminated" by architecture?

Architecture as phantasm; architecture as theater; architecture as language: three paradigms which when conflated offer an incontrovertible though unbuildable utopia, and when separated offer partial and unsatisfactory realities. Yet this should not lead one to suppose that, within the pragmatics of an architectural manichaeism, Bastide's splendidly illuminated little house is but a dandyism which can never offer the hedonistic delights of the most banal darkened bedroom in a bleak, anonymous hotel. For sex without symbol entails a pantheon without Eros, inviting the worst forms of repression and threatening the very existence of the imagination and the arts. In this regard, the link between Eros and Thanatos—a task that any valid metaphysics must attempt, and one which Sade accomplished in so hyperbolic a manner—is crucial. Erotic utopias are always proximate to shadowy necropoli. Especially now, during the cataclysm of AIDS, the ideals and pragmatics of sexuality differ vastly from those depicted in Bastide's and Sade's libertine novels and plays, such that eroticism itself has been totally transformed. Given these epochal differences, it would seem that eroticism has slipped farther than ever towards the side of darkness. Yet it is art—site of the most complex articulations of the symbolic—that can protect us from morbidity, by enriching the work of mourning through an active, productive nostalgia and a prescience of untold joys.

—ALLEN S. WEISS

Notes

1 Jean-François de Bastide, *The Little House: An Architectural Seduction*, translation and introduction by Rodolphe El-Khoury, preface by Anthony Vidler (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p. 70.

2 To forget the essential role of the imagination in eroticism, with both its joyful and terrifying aspects, is to portend the worst. This is the error of those who abominate Sade's writings, as most recently exemplified by the historically tendentious, theoretically naive, politically reactionary and covertly homophobic article by Roger Shattuck, "Rehabilitating a Monster" (*The New York Times Book Review*, March 31, 1996; p. 31). This new instance of policing desire would limit eroticism to specific sexual and symbolic choices. To do so is to repress the imagination, to seriously misunderstand literature, and to fuel the worst essentialisms and fundamentalisms.

3 Anthony Vidler, "Asylums of Libertinage," in *The Writing of the Walls* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), p.108.

4 See Chantal Thomas, *Sade* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1994), as well as the catalogue to the exhibition *Petits et Grands théâtres du Marquis de Sade* (Paris, Paris Art Center, 1989).

5 Roland Barthes, *Sade, Loyola, Fourier*, translated by Richard Miller (New York, Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 33 and 37.

Fanny Howe's *O'Clock* (Reality Street, 1995) is a pure delight; it's enjoyable merely to hold the book & gaze at the two girls on the cover, their skinny legs suspended in air while performing a jig, defying the physical laws of the universe while several adults share a conversation in the background. The poems, diminutive only in number of lines (few of them are over 12 lines), are Celtic charms of singular pitch & mesmerizing texture. What they lack in quantity of line is compensated by the "glaze of associations" each enjoys, its ascension into zones of numinous intelligence: they are liquefactions of elsewhere, infinity folded into amber.

The titles are curious; each refers, ostensibly, to the time of its composition & is sectioned according to month & day: "February One;" "February Two," "March One," & so on. What is odd is that Howe titles many of the pieces with military time, "21:09," "1:35," rather than "Nine O'Clock" or "One O'Clock," as the title of the book infers. One obvious reason for this is to avoid repetition: more than one poem is composed at nine o'clock. But apart from that, I find something deliberately droll in this rigorous exactitude: the registration of experience outside the parameters of the quantifiable is implicitly silly. As Howe herself remarks in "6:30" (the first line of which is: "A full Irish breakfast") "Space in time goes against nature/ This condition is called 'the future.'" It is more pertinent to view each poem as a "drop of experience" (to borrow a phrase from William James) rather than a composition caught in a specific instant of time. "Space-time," observed Whitehead, "is not a fact prior to process, but a feature of process, an abstract system of perspectives. . .a continuum of potentialities—of potential routes for the transmission of physical feeling." The temporal process of the universe is not continuous, but discrete, a "welter of incompatibilities" arising from a synthesis of available energies & making a creative advance into novelty. "Half of every experience is lack of experience," Howe remarks in "Winter Gone." Nothing is static; nothing is absolute. Events multiply by correlation & propagation of movement. Everything is giddy with expectation: "Showers over Flemish fields," the top of the water shuddering "under the brush of the wind," frogs undulating "under secrets of mud." Nothing exists by itself, for itself; the "pulse of desire" manifests itself in "proliferating currants." A capacity for the spontaneous introduction of something not present in the environment is part of the composition of every experience; meaning is always constituting itself anew. "One cow has given birth to three."

Not every poem in *O'Clock* is a nougat of cosmic epiphany: a few are rather thin, & a few congeal into solipsistic marzipan. But taken as a whole—fresh from the garden & spread out on the table—it's a "full Irish breakfast."

Mary Oliver's *Blue Pastures* (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) (the title suggests an asylum for dainty sensibilities, or encroaching senility) features a collection of prose pieces, meditations on nature, creativity, & Edna St Vincent Millay's louche domestic affairs. There are moments of fairly good writing, but they are frequently obscured by facile bromides & moldy banality.

I first discovered Mary Oliver amid the barred owls, red-tailed hawks & blue-winged teals of the John James Audubon *Watercolors for the Birds of America* exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum a few months ago. Surprisingly, as Mary Oliver is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet with a number of acclaimed books behind her, I hadn't heard of her. A number of the watercolors credited one of Audubon's assistants—George Lehman, Maria Bachman, or his son John—with having done a branch or a butterfly in the background, & since Mary Oliver's poems aligned some of the watercolors (I read them without my reading glasses, backing up enough to make out the words, but missing the date: 1995) the assumption I made was that Mary Oliver, a friend & contemporary, had provided Audubon with some of her poetry. Much of the language in *Blue Pastures* accounts for the mistake; not a few of the phrases—"luminous wanderer the snowy owl," "fate steps, like the most casual if gorgeously dressed sword carrier, onto the stage," "truth, that cold goddess"—have an antique flavor similar to the work I encountered at the Audubon exhibit.

There is a macabre description of skates (the marine fish with a flattened body & pectoral fins forming winglike lateral extensions) which I found rather engaging: "The strange face of the skate is haunting, and perhaps it haunts the fisherman, too—the human-looking, spit-releasing mouth, and the sudden motion of thick eyelids as they descend and rise again over the bulging, death-sick eyes." This is vivid, unaffected writing. It's unfortunate such instances are elsewhere marred by so much cliche ("galloping waves," "pond of meditation," "steamy river of dreams"), so much banality & vapid pontification. Admittedly, anyone who wins a Pulitzer Prize should be indulged the privilege of speaking ex cathedra on occasion; but when I read a sentence like "he who does not crave that roofless place *eternity* should stay at home" I lose all interest. A bag of French fries is vastly preferable to a "roofless eternity," and I have yet to see a "roofed eternity," unless it resembles a Lincoln Continental parked in a two door garage in a sunny 'burb called *Blue Pastures*.

I sometimes wonder if Bruce Andrews isn't a Sioux Heyoka, a shrewd clown doing what's contrary—silly, gratuitous, grotesque—in order to disrupt stultifying modes of being. One look at the rolypoly farting Asian man randomly figured in different positions on the cover of *Ex Why Zee* (Roof Books, 1995) is to anticipate a convulsive species of bathroom

graffiti, agitprop on a toilet stall. But Andrews is a far more intractable poet than that: hectic, fractious, galling, madcap & sassy, he is a Woody Woodpecker on benzedrine, a Lenny Bruce versed in Marx, Benjamin & Lukacs, rubbing "red pepper into the normative" & inviting us—the book buying, reifying public—to suck his "polymorphous." "Taste is one of the principal bulwarks against which [Andrews'] writing hurls itself," writes Bob Perelman in "Bruce Andrews and the World (Trade Center)," and identifies Andrews' penchant for grossness as a "subset of the larger desire for disruption of perceived systems of control." Other strategies include avoidance of a predetermined referent, removal of closure, fractured syntax, high-energy linguistic collision & the crash of accelerated signifiers. Andrews invigorates language by investing it with a convulsive spontaneity, somatic ejaculations & jerky thrusts, Houdini trying to wriggle free of a strait-jacket. *Ex Why Zee* (is the title a Silliman tease?) is a miscellany of performance instructions, movement notes & improvisational texts, many of them done in collaboration with dance choreographer Sally Silvers. It's a bit like Duchamp's notes to the *Large Glass,* not just a Baedeker but a creative *à la carte.* Unlike Duchamp's notes, however, the notes in *Ex Why Zee* concur with no tangible context to gratify the appetite. It's like a menu without a restaurant. "Who Shouted?" concerns the "daily life, ancestry, and dream imagery of the Lacandon Maya (with some material culled from Robert Bruce's *Lacandon Dream Symbolism* on their collective use of dream as prophecy & warning)." "Movement for the piece was selected from Silvers' videotaped improvised solo material, created while under the influence of (or intoxicated by) Classic Mayan writing & images." "The organization of the movement—both spatially & directionally—is based on Mayan conceptions of time & space." That sounds fantastic. I picture deliriously weird contortions, a wildly erratic agitation of body movements somewhat akin to Japanese Butoh. But to simply read & mentally re-enact these pieces is ultimately a frustrating exercise. I wish a videocassette could've accompanied the book, although the increased market value of Andrews' product would have utterly compromised the implied cultural intent to demystify what Lukacs terms the "fetish character of commodities," the disintegrating effect of an all-embracing commodity structure that taints social relations with a "phantom objectivity," an oppressive, controlling force that alienates the individual from their own activity. So it's a puzzle. How do you distribute spontaneity, market the unmarketable?

A few of the texts, such as "Blue Horizon" ("Tsunami enfleurage/ emulsifying sea floor oleander goblets on a root") & "Politics of the Body Microscope of Conduct" ("Syllables, take your positions") feature enough textual autonomy to stand on their own, unhinging—as Andrews long ago espoused in the L= A= N= G= U= A= G= E Book—"the vise of the signi-

fied," so that reading becomes *production* rather than consumption. Andrews, as always, pushing polysemy to the point of asemy, disseminating "logobonbons" like xenoblastic yaupon zarfs.

"What so elates the open poem are the passersby" writes Duncan McNaughton in "Black Spoon," the 52 page long poem of *Valparaiso* (Listening Chamber, 1995). "English words crave spaces between them, they do not like to huddle in clusters of slightly divergent centers of meaning, each edging a little away from the rest" wrote Edward Sapir in *Language*. 'Open' is the operative word here: McNaughton joys in looseness & elasticity. He lets his work breathe. He undoes knots, unravels "the music of thoughts." Reading this work is a quiet, gentle pleasure. It has a relaxed, amiable air. I am fascinated by the way poets choose to represent pleasure & pain; the two states are never polarities but always a blend. Even in Chopin's most melancholic phrases, observed Proust, are sprinkled gracious detours *"où le caprice se mêle à la virtuosité."* "Black Spoon" (the image that comes to mind is the spoon used for "cooking" heroin, blackened with carbon) is strewn on the page like flotsam, the typographical arrangement mirroring the verbal *naufrage* of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*. The words *do* cohere syntactically, however, so it is not really an instance of the language dissolving into oblivion so much as a feeling of euphoric buoyancy, openness, a letting out. Implicit in McNaughton's & Mallarmé's typographical metaphor is the presence of absence, the idea that nihility—void, nothingness, non-being—is immanent in all things in much the same way the signified is both present & absent from the signifier. It is the syntax of the streets, the syntax of human behavior, that simultaneously threatens to pull things apart & keep things together. "Like/ when we undress/ to seek/ each other's heat." The real threat is in nomenclature—classification, categorization, commodification. "In this world false names/ enslave real ones." Underlying the pathos of "Black Spoon" is the desire to be liberated from the linguistic, psychic & social networks that convert "living light" to the simulacra of "black markets." "Beauty/ trapped in sadness/ asks only to be set free." One steps from syntagm to syntagm like stones in a brook, leaping in unexpected directions when a rock turns out to be wobbly & the body's actions compensate for the mind's more cumbersome ratiocination. "Magnetized fragments" cohere into "wraiths of or shadows/ of substantial being," or more horrifically, a grenade "which/ a poet/ detonated/ in 1920/ showers/ the poem/ with the blood/ of/ the names/ of/ the worlds" that inhabit *"la sepultura del este poeta."* It is the poet's task to relocate our *Valparaiso* in "the throat/ of the sun." McNaughton achieves this with a degree of *ébullition:* "Boil it down and/ boil it down/ and boil it down/ Samoa." A lump of artificial paradise in the valley of a blackened spoon. "They fill with tears/ to the brim *ces fontaines/ de jouvence."*

Andrew Schelling's *Old Growth* (Rodent Press, 1995) is a foliation of poems & notebooks composed from 1986 to 1994. It is rooted in modernist soil, Pound's Vorticist notions of the image as "luminous detail," "radiant node or cluster." Stamped with Imagist concision, Schelling's shillings betoken Gaudier-Brzeska's chiseled edge, the gravure of a voice minted in a rhythm meant to correspond "exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed." "Anthropology calls it the raw and the cooked," notes Schelling. "Most of the time we humans like to come down on the cooked side. Yet we 'sleep in the raw,' make love buck naked, and prefer a poetry not too dressed up." Anselm Hollo, in his blurb on the back, alludes to Lorine Niedecker: "live word works, informed by a gentle yet uncompromising awareness of how much 'gets away' and how much can, after all be held and recorded." Niedecker is an instructive comparison, but I hear a lot more of Gary Snyder in Schelling's telegraphic *éclats* of objectified reality: "Be slack on the reins./ In the gulch/ lupine./ Water looks clear down the creekbed." "Trace veins of stone/ up river beds/ and find a gem." The vigor of Schelling's verse is also more akin to Snyder than Niedeker: "Teach me to handle good wine/ teach me to fondle/ Aphrodite's gold pelt." Such lyrical swashbuckling is not without interest, but where Snyder's robustness is unaffected & natural, Schelling's Bacchic braggadocio ("Make my brow while I still live/ festive with roses,/ give me perfume, a girl") is a bit stagy & off-putting. Schelling shares Niedecker's density, but lacks her interiority, her nimble variegation, & the gist of his compression sometimes collapses into cryptic enigma: "I got claw ash/ at resin light/ toggled/ to noon."

Nevertheless, Schelling has some great moments here. "All the Animal Ladies Come Home to Their Temple," composed outside Bhubaneshvar, Orissa State, India, by the Temple of the Sixty-Four Yoginis, is a zinger, a great poem. It oozes sexuality & a feeling of life captured with such vividness you can smell the "groves of cashew" & "flayed elephant hide blocking the sun," the sheer feral mystery of the women "daubed with red paste," "pointed nipples on sour rib-bones," "coming from rock/ from tree-root coming/ out of the coconut husk/ out of seashells/ cookpots, milkjugs/ come to enter the ring from every direction." "All the Animal Ladies" is verdant with Pound's "world of moving energies." Had all the leaves in *Old Growth* been this pungent, we'd have a new hybrid on our hands.

—JOHN OLSON

"FeMina / of the thoroughfare": Review of *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy,* by Carolyn Burke. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

In his biography *Ezra Pound,* Charles Norman quotes a brief but intriguing reminiscence of Pound from Mina Loy, Wondering if Norman knew Loy, I turned to his memoir to see if it would yield any information about Loy's later career.[1] *Poets & People* mentions Loy once, in connection with the internationally famous New York art gallery of her son-in-law, Julien Levy:

> The gallery was posh, with a surrealist aura. In addition to painting by Dali, Berman, and Tchelitchew, there were magic boxes on the walls, made of mirrors and velvet, in which dwelt tiniest fairylands. *Beautiful women were also to be seen there,* fluttering the draperies: Levy's wife at the time, Goiela [sic], daughter of the poet Mina Loy, and Muriel Streeter, a young painter and his future wife [emphasis added].[2]

This is the sole reference to Loy in the entire book, and all it suggests is a chance association of her name with these famous (Dali) and semi-obscure others (Streeter). Norman's account of the gallery seems unremarkable; his rhetoric, however, is not. That italicized clause generates a tiny shock of surrealist ambiguity: are the "beautiful women. . .to be seen" in the flesh, or are they only virtually present, as fairies in "magic boxes"? The ambiguous description alludes, logically enough, to Joseph Cornell's "magic boxes" (which were exhibited, I believe, for the first time at the Levy Gallery), but it functions more like a magician's container—the kind which makes pretty women appear to disappear, to be harmlessly deleted or sawed in two.

Nested potentially within the boxes, within the galleries, within the histories of avant garde writing and art, is the fugitive presence of Mina Loy. It takes a sustained effort of patience to see her there, in all that fluttering rhetorical confusion of spousal flesh, and to see her for the strikingly innovative artist and active cultural worker that she was. Excavating Loy's story is not merely a self-rewarding activity; it also tells us crucial things about the connections between the old world and the new, at a moment when avant garde art bridged the two.

Consider the account of Loy and the Julien Levy Gallery which Carolyn Burke, author of this impressive first biography, has pulled from the trick bag of history. Mina Loy was a writer, but she was also an accomplished painter. She studied art in three countries, and at propitious moments—in

London and Paris when modern painting was delivered from Pre-Raphaelitism and the beaux-arts style, and in Munich at the height of the *Jugendstil*. Burke is particularly good at evoking the atmospherics of these historical moments, despite the fact that the early portions of Loy's story are founded in evidence which is fragmentary and/or subjective—that is, supplied by Loy herself.[3] Here is Burke's picture of Loy at 18, during her year at the Munich Künstlerinnenverein (Society of Female Artists' School), in the streets with a friend at Carnival:

> To look them, she and Alexander had exchanged sexes: he had a Neapolitan woman's costume with a velvet hood, and she wore black velvet knickers and had her hair cut short like a medieval page's. . . .The cafés were full of masqueraders throwing confetti. . . .One evening, as Mina gazed at the showers of confetti dotting the newly-fallen snow, Munich looked like a Pissarro painting. The Carnival had provided a subject suitable to his technique. But how could one capture the flamboyance of Fasching? Everything familiar was turned upside down.[4]

The passage is derived from Loy's *Islands in the Air*, the narrative for which she named the entire autobiographical sequence of works. Burke has taken Loy's prose, set it in factual context, and held it up to the biographer's light. This has the subtle effect here of filtering the scene through Loy's own earliest memory (or being mesmerized by her father's kaleidoscopic array of colored bottles, set before a fanlight above a doorway), which Burke reads as the revenant "subconscious archive" of a difficult Lacanian passage to individuation. At the same time, the description of Loy allows us to see through the unobtrusive lens of a theorist's interest in the urban, gendered, carnivalesque dimensions of the evolving modernist style in its many manifestations. In other words, Burke's book, here and throughout, is astute and in all the ways we could ask it to be: historical, cultural, psychoanalytical, and readerly.

Loy's subsequent itinerary, as painter and writer, was no less remarkable: she frequented the heady gatherings at the residences of Gertrude Stein (and later, Natalie Barney) in Paris and Mabel Dodge in Florence. Loy read *The Making of Americans* in manuscript around 1909, and her understanding of its stylistic advances on representational prose was fondly recalled by Stein.[5] By 1914, Loy was in dialogue with the Futurists, then at their nadir; in 1916, she traveled to New York, on the cross-pollinating trade winds of Dada and the free verse movement. By the time her first volume of poems appeared she was an established painter, and a notorious writer

and modern-woman-about-town.[6] She has been championed by figures as diverse as Marcel Duchamp, Djuna Barnes, and Thomas Merton. The first biographically fascinated assessment of Loy's art came early, in a 1917 issue of the New York *Evening Sun;* she was profiled as "the modern woman" by a reporter whose skepticism does not prevent him from remarking, in connection with his subject, that "some people think the women are the cause of modernism, whatever that is."[7]

In the twenties, Loy returned to Paris, where she became a kind of surrealist *avant la lettre,* constructing narratives and lampshades out of dreamlike memories and *objets trouvés* from the Marché aux Puces. Enamored of his penniless but colorful mother-in-law, Julien Levy tapped her sensibility, expertise, and Paris contacts to distinguish his infant gallery as "a veritable beachhead of Surrealism in the United States."[8] In 1932, the gallery afforded New York its first glimpse of the work of the Surrealists, and of Joseph Cornell. That year, Loy accompanied Levy to a clandestine Paris screening of Buñuel's film *L'Age d'Or;* overcoming his doubts, she persuaded him to show it in New York. The success of the event was not the only way in which her judgment would prove itself. As Levy's Paris connection, Loy was instrumental in securing a stable of artists whose most common denominator is brilliance: Braque, Cartier-Bresson, de Chirico, Dali, Ernst, Gorky, Kahlo, Magritte, and Tchelitchew among them.

In early 1933, the paintings on the walls of the Levy Gallery were Loys. A critic for the *Sun* articulated the synaesthetic aspect of her work when he called her first solo exhibition "a sort of sonnet sequence," and added that "those who respond to Blake and Arthur Rimbaud and other such mystics may come to terms with Mina Loy."[9] Cornell was one who responded; he recorded his memory of the vivid colors of Loy's 1933 exhibition years later, and requested pictures of her, to be included in one of his box-shaped altars to fe(y)male creativity, beauty, and "white magic."[10] The extent to which their friendship inspired their work has only barely been considered. Burke's biography orients the discussion by pinpointing the moment when "Mina had taken her place in his mental galaxy." Cornell called the slow process of his work a "type of image-search akin to poetics," and as Burke suggests, the two artists drew from the same fund of astral imagery.[11]

What, finally, was Mina Loy's role in inventing and disseminating the ideas which comprised Futurism? New York Dada? Anglophone Modernism? Surrealism?[12] At minimum, Loy belongs to the record as one of the few feminist commentators on these movements; it is time that their histories be reconstructed to account for her hyperarticulate presence. In the process of writing a dissertation about Mina Loy, assembling a bibliography, and constructing a critical edition of her poems, the passage from Norman's

memoir became emblematic of the difficulties involved in the revisionary project.[13] The first obstacles are material: Loy functioned in several media, four languages, and under cover of maiden, married, and self-fashioned names; her logopoeic poetry ardently courted censorship and obscurity, and has been available in print only sporadically. Her many memoir-writing contemporaries often remembered her as a raving beauty, a faded beauty, or a spectacle, but not as an artist.[14] Critics still remain in thrall to the agendas of the key publicists, past and present, of these various movements; historical accounts of avant garde activities begin to look suspiciously supposition-bound to any student of Loy's career.

Carolyn Burke's extensive research and feminist perceptiveness provides us with all the material we need to begin this effort of reconsideration. Working against the historiographic weave, Burke has constructed a first biography of the subject alternately known, to her contemporaries, as Mina-Minna-Jemima-Dusie-Ducie-Gusta-Rita-Imna-Oly-Levi-Lowy-Ilaweis-Cravan-Lloyd-Loy. Scholars have waited over a decade for this book, and contrary to some press reports, are grateful that it has arrived. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* has had a predictably motley reception, the articles typically revealing more about the reviewer then the book. One of the first, a brief mention in *Kirkus Reviews*, "hail[s]" Loy as an "early arty feminist" but claims that she "comes off" in this "impressively detailed but cold and disagreeable biography" as unreal, "a creature who might just as easily been invented, pieced together from scraps of her contemporaries for whom we do have a feeling: Mabel Dodge, Duchamp, et al."[15] Upon suspicion of frigidity ("cold," "disagreeable," unfeeling) and—consequently—of unreality, the writer impugns biographer and subject alike, dismissing the archival and theoretical underpinnings of the book as he unknowingly revives a question asked years ago—a question to which Loy herself archly replied: "I assure you I am indeed a live being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown. . . ."[16] In other words, he does not so much explore as succumb to the elaborately constructed incognito of this artist, who set about misdating her paintings and constructing a poetic so avant garde that postmodernism and feminist theory may be said to have set the table for her revival banquet. The criticism might perhaps have been fended off if Burke (who is also Irigaray's translator) had been more radical in her approach to this biography as "collage" or "assemblage,"[17] but I doubt it.

The quality of Loy's literary art eclipses, even, her biographical genius; she will be remembered preeminently as an artist, secondarily as a cultural figure. Writing about her poetry in the course of documenting the textual instability of her "menuscripts," I have become convinced of this. In the newly-edited *Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy,* Roger Conover's pugilistic, fact-rich, courtier-like defense draws a memorably Loy-al zig-

zagging line in the sand of literary history. Carolyn Burke's biography, which gathers in timely testimony from a generation that is quickly receding from us, makes it clear that Loy's existence is vividly indisputable.[18] Together, the two books lay stubborn, unconditional seige to the canons, but at least the scene is familiar. Loy wrote the battlements.

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Notes

1 Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (Revised Edition: New York: Minerva Press, 1969) 273. The excerpt, in part: "He was like a child, and an old professor at the same time. His craze then was endocrine glands. He would talk about it a great deal—very learned discussion. 'Glands,' she added, 'were the latest thing at the time.'" Norman, I discovered, hadn't gotten Loy's comments firsthand, but had taken them from an article by George H. Tichenor: " This Man is a Traitor: A Story of the Life and Works of Ezra Pound, Who Scorned the People." *PM* 4.50 (New York, 15 August 1943): Sunday Picture Magazine section, 3-5.

2 Norman, Charles. *Poets & People*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972.

3 Readers who know Loy primarily from Roger Conover's generous selection in the *Last Lunar Baedeker* (Jargon Society, 1982) may nevertheless not be aware of the extent of her unpublished prose writings, housed mostly in the Loy collection at the Beinecke Library. She left overlapping drafts of five undated autobiographical novels in manuscript, and a sixth, *Colossus*, which has been excerpted in print—most extensively in French: tr. Jean-Pierre Begot in *Oeuvres d'Arthur Cravan* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1987), but also in English: *Colossus*, introduced and edited by Roger Conover in *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf E Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), 102-119. A finished segment of the cycle, *Insel*, has been published (Black Sparrow, 1991).

4 Burke, 59.

5 Stein, Gertrude. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1933): 162.

6 This book, *Lunar Baedecker* [sic] (Paris: Contact, 1923), attracted the attention of Edwin Muir, who wrote one of the most perceptive (if somewhat negative) descriptions of her poetic project:

> . . .She is a mystic of a very peculiar kind, a negative mystic, the chief fruit of whose mysticism is an acridly intimate awareness of the flesh. She is perplexed, she is disconcerted painfully, by the senses; and her poetry is a protest against them, expressed in a photographic, relentless portrayal of their antics. Even when she is moved by pity, the sense of metaphysical obscenity is not far away; but that obscenity is the complement of her subconscious, helpless mysticism. This deep-set and unresolved conflict gives her work intensity, but, naturally, gives it only in flashes; and she never attains the serenity out of which great poetry comes. Given her limits, however, she is so genuine that her utterance arrests us.
>
> E.M. [Edwin Muir]. "Recent Verse." *The New Age* #1643, n.s. vol. XXXIV #196 March 1924(b) p. 223.

7 "Do You Strive to Capture the Symbols of Your Reactions? If Not You Are Quite Old Fashioned." New York: *The Evening Sun*, Tuesday, February 13, 1917, p. 10.

8 Sawin 1995, 79.

9 "Attractions in the Galleries." *New York Evening Sun* (4 February 1933): 9; quoted in Burke, 379.

10 It is not clear to me that the pictures which she sent were ever used in this capacity, though I have been told that a box containing her daughter's image is extant.

11 Julien Levy's memoir is still one of the most extensive, if not evaluative, accounts of the friendship between Loy and Cornell (*Memoir of an Art Gallery*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977). In a review of David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet*, Thom Gunn includes ML and Elizabeth Bishop in a brief list of artists inspired by Joseph Cornell's boxes. He then contrasts the "self-absorbed playfulness" of Bishop's imagery unfavorably against the "bite" of the images in another "fantasy, Mina Loy's 'Lunar Baedeker,' where for example 'A flock of dreams/browse on Necropolis.'" Finally, his memory of the colors of Loy's 1933 exhibition is preserved in *Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind: Selected Diaries, Letters, and Files* (Ed. with an introduction by Mary Ann Caws. Foreword by John Ashbery. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993). The paucity of selections referring to Loy accurately preserves the proportion of references to her in the diaries as a whole, but the quality of the remarks is tantalizing. Perhaps more on Loy will emerge when Cornell's unmicrofilmed papers are finally organized and housed at the Cornell Study Center.

12 The spiritualized eroticism and material counterculturalism of the Beats, even? The claim for Loy's proto-Beat sensibility was made by Josh Weiner, in "An Otherwise Beat: Mina Loy's 'Hot Cross Bum,'" a paper delivered on June 19, 1996 at the National Poetry Foundation conference, "American Poetry in the 1950s."

13 The edition is a supplement to the dissertation, *Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]: Mine Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics*, Columbia University, forthcoming in 1996. The annotated bibliography of works by and about her will appear in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* eds. Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, forthcoming).

14 For example, Sylvia Beach's record of Joyce's first meeting with Loy (and her two daughters) is anything but literary: "Joyce, who could see as well as anyone when he wanted to, observed that Joella was a beauty according to all the standards. . .So [of the three women] she had Joyce's vote." *Shakespeare and Company*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959. There is no doubt that Loy, the author of a pamphlet called "Auto-Facial Construction," was gifted in what Joan Riviere called the "masquerade of femininity."

15 Unsigned notice, *Kirkus Reviews*, 15 November 1995.

16 The *Last Lunar Baedeker*, Roger Conover, ed. (Jargon Society, 1982) xviii.

17 In "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference" [*American Quarterly* 39 (1987): 98121], Burke identifies "an important counterstrain of modernist poetics—centered on modalities of joining and separation, union and disunion—that was first exemplified in the paratactic and gender-conscious writing of Gertrude Stein." As Burke explains, the term for "collage," in French, is also the slang word for a domestic union which is sexual but not licit: Stein's use of the collage technique, then, smuggles a biographically-inspired "poetics of gender" into a style which has been read, primarily, in formalist terms. In *Becoming Modern*, Burke hesitates to reverse this formulation. She chooses to "eschew the strategies of modernist juxtaposition" for the straight coherence of the more or less linear narrative which makes standard biographies accessible and recognizable as such. It is an understandable decision, given the fact that, at the time of the book's inception, Burke was one of only a tiny handful of people who were writing knowledgeably about Loy. Still, one wonders about the potential implications of the aesthetic advances of Stein and Loy for biography as a genre. Irigaray's identification of "a woman" as a fluid heterogeneity (rather than the unitary occupant of the subject position assigned to her in the dominant symbolic) makes the stakes explicit. What would an Irigarayan biography look like?

18 Burke quotes or paraphrases the late Berenice Abbott, the late Djuna Barnes, the late Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, the late Basil Bunting, and so on.

Will Alexander's *The Stratospheric Canticles* (Pantograph, 1995) is simultaneously defense and enactment of a poetics of apocalypse. The poet as "fumarole" might be said to define Alexander's sense of poetic vocation in this collection of shorter poems ending with the forty-page title poem. Not just this last poem but several others in the book outline an "aesthetic," though such a word might seem to Alexander the relic of European discourses, inadequately descriptive of a project better understood as cosmology for "an era of post-eternity." Nevertheless, one can point to distinctive properties of the poetry here, as Alexander himself does in a poem called "Apprenticeship"—hypotaxis, "paratactic co-ordination." With the various, manifold accomplishments of a poetics of disjunction in full view lately, and now much imitated Alexander's "technique" is itself of great interest for its location outside of both "avant-garde" and "mainstream" orthodoxies. Of course the one aspect of Alexander's work that has received the most comment—his prodigious vocabulary, his "logolatry" (as the title of a Mark Scroggins review in the *American Book Review's* special number on "postmodern" African-American poetry had it), is evident in this as in other Alexander works.

But Alexander's idioms, it seems to me, his allusions to everything from Sufi mysticism to "microbial botany" are not meant to map a vast terrain of erudition. Nor is this a language in the service of plenitude and difference, not exactly anyway, despite the pressing ecological concerns of this poetry. Rather, the various idioms, vocabularies, and images of Alexander's poetry are eminently transmutable, one into the other. The energy of this poetry is not wholly or even importantly an effect of its pyrotechnic particulars—I'm not sure that we are meant to check a dictionary to see how "precise" Alexander is, as Eliot Weinberger suggests in the book's blurb. I'm struck instead by the agglutination of parts in Alexander's poems, and more problematically by the way in which an expressivist force distills all the poem's matter to the ONE MATTER to the cosmos which is also the self—pressurized, turbulent, eruptive. Make no mistake about it: this is a poetry that would "will" its way through and beyond historical contingency:

> it can be said that one is unified by pressure
> by an intensity which mingles in sub-bodies of radium
> crossing & re-crossing the endless enclaves of heaven
>
> the Milky Way
> a single territorial nuance
> a single brush with totality

Who else writes such "canticles" nowadays? And, yet, at times, one tires of the fever-pitch—Alexander himself notes that "I've looked /only for the tonalities that scorch." And, at times, I am suspicious not only of the alchemist's ego but also of the reductionist mantras that become part of the exorcism in process.

"Greece," "Christianity," Cartesian rationality and Europe itself stand in this poetry as undifferentiated wholes reflecting only "entropy" or "the brazen execution of a society in neurosis." Heroes, too, emerge in a similarly one-dimensional casting: Jackson Pollock, who might have saved Europe, Alexander thinks, giving it back its "absent alchemical nigredo," or Miro—the title poem is framed as a history and discussion of painting. Against the destructive force of the West, there's "the Southern psyche" and "the invisible centrality of Asia." In this titanic struggle of monoliths, "one must paint like a terrifying angel/ producing from one's eyes/an alien xenogenesis. . . ." This is a religious poetry, clearly, structured by desire—perhaps my skepticisms seem to Alexander part of "the wicked Euro-abscess model/claiming democracy & engagement/claiming a factotum of decimals. . . ." Alexander's description of history as "no more than an infected thermogenesis" and his caricature of scientists "sweating from the power of strong findings" as they mine "the gulf of the dead for genes" and "kill off the tropics" strike me, especially when isolated from the poem as a whole, as hortatory, venomous, and dangerously reductive. But the purpose of this expressivist verse is to purge, "to peer into the obverse," to summon the rhythms of cataclysm. It knows what it's about: its readers should not neglect its revolutionary agendas while admiring their view of the arcane and the surreal. Attention to particulars is less consequential here than attention to the whole, though there are brilliant moments such as when Alexander avers that "in the saliva of newts/ one sees the intestinal raging of deltas" or when he catalogs the effects of pushing beyond Christianity's reading of "death" and into the void:

> then one forgets what death was like
> its intermediate frenzy
> its howling jugular waters
> its large debacle of circles
> its lighter & darker spasmodics
> its ominous flight of disjunctive agraphia
>
> one can no longer condense its force as a golden remedial hurdle
> or as a genuine & necessitous punishment

one must live with the altimeter
with an eerie alchemical endlessness
which engenders a hypnotic parallel breathing
a breathing further and further removed
from an immense inconclusive bondage
from the limits of muscle & corrosive calf imprints

This poetry has didactic moments too, as the above illustrates, and what could be more unfashionable? I wish I knew more about the traditions that here and there seem to underlie it—Arabic angelology, perhaps Sufi mysticism, alchemy itself. That I don't indicates the need for Alexander, who represents in more ways than I can name a tremendous force of intervention—an Artaud turning over our worlds—in the incestuous pockets of contemporary American poetry.

But in the end I was left thinking of Bloch's phrase—"something's missing." What' s missing here are tonalities and modalities that might show us what else there is besides fever. We get a glimpse of these in "The Mesmeric Remora"—a monologue of the remora, the "suckerfish" seen around sharks—and occasionally in other poems, but such glimpses are altogether overwhelmed by Alexander's "ceaseless admixture of terror" and fury.

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I cannot imagine a book more unlike Alexander's than Harryette Mullen's *Muse & Drudge* (Singing Horse, 1995). Having previously adapted "the new sentence," having taken Gertrude Stein to the supermarket in the comic and cutting, gender and race-inflected prose texts of *S*PeRM**K*T,* Mullen turns in *Muse & Drudge* to what she describes in the issue of the *American Book Review* mentioned above as "a more-or-less recognizably 'colored,' 'negro,' 'black,' or 'african-american' base of folk-street-blues-based riffs, rap, and rhetoric." As she notes, *Muse & Drudge* is "a pretty straightforward praise song to women of the African diaspora, although a good deal of it is less than flattering; on the other hand, it is a blues riff on Sappho as Sapphire." Here the stanza rather than the "new sentence" is the primary prosodic unit, but more often than not individual stanzas are discrete units and thereby continue to manifest an engagement with some of the "experimental" forms and structures articulated and defined over the last two decades. At the level of critical theory and polemic, much has been made of the role of the reader in various disjunctive and "language poetry" modes, of the potential for interrupting the tautological certitudes of "disciplined" discourses poetic and otherwise, of the politics of resisting familiar and naturalized narrative and lyric modes and their subjectivities.

But I'm unaware of a defense of, say, the work of Ron Silliman framed as a defense of a poetics of inclusion, and that seems to me one of the strongest cases to be made on behalf of such a poetry—that it lets in so much, that it is flooded with referents. I'd want to make the same case for the poetry of *Muse & Drudge,* though to read Mullen is to meet a more self-consciously playful, sympathetic if still feminist engagement with the everyday than Silliman's densely descriptive, pun-ful, ironized male gaze typically allows. Mullen is a comedian, and a damn good one, though the accumulated effect of her stanzas in *Muse & Drudge* is partly a melancholy, as if all of the miming of popular culture, the ecstatic play of particular lines and stanzas, the woven sound-textures, circle an absence they cannot name.

Thus, while the poem doesn't appear to have an overarching, linear movement that I would be able to describe, it didn't really surprise me—though it surely "moved" me—when I met these stanzas on the book's last page:

> just as I am I come
> knee bent and body bowed
> this here's sorrow's home
> my body's southern song
>
> cram all you can
> into jelly jam
> preserve a feeling
> keep it sweet
>
> so beautiful it was
> presumptuous to alter
> the shape of my pleasure
> in doing or making
>
> proceed with abandon
> finding yourself where you are
> and who you're playing for
> what stray companion

Is Mullen a Christian poet? I'm not prepared to say. At any rate, I'm struck in this book by how *comfortable* she is with common and popular idioms, how these are allowed their own dignity even as they meet the wordplay and the pressurized, condensed energies of line and stanza. In the *ABR,* Mullen writes that she can "remember 20-year-old jingles, but couldn't recite a line of Jay Wright or Ed Roberson to save my soul." One way to

look at this fact (and it is true of many others, I suspect, that they can quote more Bob Dylan or John Lee Hooker than Charles Olson or Kamau Brathwaite) is as an example of the way that mass culture "has used my brain as a petri dish"—to quote Mullen again. We can summon the shades of Adorno and Althusser. But I think also of Robert Creeley's defense of the common and the commonplace in "Some Senses of the Commonplace," where he says the following of the "trite, trivial, and hackneyed" songs of Hank Williams: "And it isn't that they are great *in spite of that. Because of that*, they are glorious, and absolutely elating, reassuring, and in all ways acceptable as great art." When an intelligence and a gifted ear such as Mullen's comes to hear common idioms, leaving them alone while also remixing them in angular, witty stanzas and rhymes, we have a poetry that traverses the always permeable boundaries of the ordinary and the extraordinary, of popular culture and so-called "high culture," in truly remarkable and powerful ways.

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I'd like to call the reader's attention to some other books and new magazines—Michael Palmer's *At Passages* (New Directions), Norma Cole's *Moira* (O Books), Joseph Donahue's *World Well Broken* (Talisman House), the Washington D. C. journal *Flashpoint* [P.O. Box 6243, Washington D. C.20015-0243], the Chicago-based (and free!) journal *LVNG* [P.O. Box 3865 Chicago, IL 60654-0865]. There's also Allen Fisher's *Scram: or the transformation of the concept of Cities* (Spectacular Diseases), a good introduction to the work of one of Britain's most important "alternative" writers. In his introductions to the book's sections, as elsewhere throughout his career, Fisher presents a challenge to all those who would seek to identify coherent and stable aesthetic practices—no work is more rigorously situated, more fluid in its development and targeted occasions. There is also Cole Swensen's *Numen* (Burning Deck) and her translation of Pierre Alferi, *Natural Gaits* (Sun & Moon). Swensen seems to me one of the best writers to emerge from a post-language poetry, "New Coast" nexus, and Alferi is a poet who has absorbed specific scientific work without feeling the need to try to trump it with the spectre of the ancient powers of poetry. I hope to discuss some of the above works in the near future, in this or another forum.

I'll conclude, though, by mentioning Andrew Crozier's edition of the selected writings of John Rodker, *Poems & Adolphe 1920* (Carcanet, 1996). [It's best had by writing 402-406 Corn Exchange Buildings Manchester M4 3BY England.] I know I've beaten this horse before, but there's a good deal of important "alternative" writing now being produced in Britain, much of it going its own way. Andrew Crozier has promoted some of it as an

anthologist, and he is one of a comparatively few British poet-scholars actively working to retrieve from decades of neglect various modernist poetries crushed by either the accidents of fate or the orthodoxies of Movement and post-Movement British poetry. John Rodker was a London contemporary of Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. His Ovid Press published Eliot, Pound, and Lautréamont, among many others; he succeeded Pound as editor of *The Little Review*. His poet's novella *Adolphe* was once described by Pound as an advance on the methods of Joyce's *Ulysses*. "Recovering" his work—to use the fashionable academic phrase—allows us to see anew and in a less monumentalized perspective an historical (and a British) modernism. As Crozier notes, "[I]n Rodker we find neither the erasure of the writing subject, nor the ironic objectification of the dramatic subject in its imputed language: both of them modes which constituted the modernity of Pound and Eliot. . . .To an extent Pound was right when in 1914 he classified Rodker as a Futurist. Where Rodker differs from Futurism, however, is precisely in not objectifying mechanical sensation. His writing is permeated with the affective modes of the self." Rodker emerged from very different contexts than those which gave shape to the masculinist modernism of Pound and others—he was Jewish, he was in contact with the poetry and dance-theater of the "Choric School," which was much more open to and influenced by women. There is a sustained interest in Freud, a deeper engagement with the macabre underwriting an "unironic subjectivity"—all of this makes the intersection of Rodker with the Vorticist nexus in London all the more fascinating. There are prose poems and theatrical forms which also set Rodker apart from canonical modernist practice. For me, the best book of poems is *Hymns* (1920), which has among its gems a "Hymn to Love" surely written in response to Mina Loy's "mucous-menbrane[s]" in her "Pig Cupid," the first of her then-scandalous "Songs to Joannes." It's printed here first among a series of other "hymns." I'll finish by quoting the whole of a shorter poem, where imagist technique and the "objective correlative" meet Rodker's idiosyncratically expressive despair. In the second strophe, note the effect of the white space splitting the first line, which might perhaps be said to force a homoerotic tension into the poem; note too the acceleration in the second line followed by the deceleration of the third, with its hardly noticed rhyme. This is writing which, in its own small subtleties, deserves to be remembered:

I'd have loved you as you
deserved had we been frogs

Where did I hear of two smooth frogs
clasped among rushes
in love and death:
rigid and with spread fingers.

And we men
all brain, all heart, hot blood;
turn lightly, then
'Ah, weren't we once friends?'

—KEITH TUMA

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

ADONIS, pen name of Ali Admad Said, founder of Muwakif, is one of the most significant and controversial contemporary Arab poets, often mentioned as a contender for the Nobel Prize. He was born in Syria in 1929, moved to Beirut in the mid-fifties where he was a prominent member of the modernist group of poets known as the Sh'r movement. He now lives in Paris. ALLEN HIBBARD is the author of *Paul Bowles: A Study of the Short Fiction* and *Crossing to Abbassiya and Other Stories,* published in Arabic. He teaches at Middle Tennessee State University and is writing a biography of Alfred Chester. OSAMU ISBER is a Syrian poet, short story writer, and translator who has been an active force behind the innovative literary journal *Alef.* Among his translations into Arabic have been Eduardo Galeano's *Memory of Fire* and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient.* In 1997 Sun & Moon Press will publish CHARLES BERNSTEIN's *Republics of Reality: Poems 1975–1995.* LUIGI BALLERINI is a native of Milan, Italy, and currently a professor of Italian Literature at UCLA. A poet, scholar, cultural entrepreneur and critic, he has published numerous books of poetry and scholarship throughout his career, including *Che Figurato Muore* (1988), *Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves: Explorations in Italian Art* (1982), and *Shearsmen of Sorts: Italian Poetry 1975-1993* (1994). JEREMY PARZEN has translated Italian authors such as Goldini and Marinetti. He currently works at the Getty Research Institute in Santa Monica and is completing his Ph.D. dissertation on Petrarchan transcription and versification. The filmmaker/

director Euzhan Palzy *(Sugar-Cane Alley, A Dry White Season,* among others) has recently complete dubbing her three hour documentary film on AIME CESAIRE, who, at this time, at 83, is still in good health in Fort-de-France, Martinique. In the spring of 1997, Marsilio will publish a bilingual edition of CLAYTON ESHLEMAN and ANNETTE SMITH's translation of Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land,* with a new translation of André Breton's 1943 essay on Césaire. ANNE CORAY is a lifelong Alaskan, working toward an MFA degree at UAA-Anchorage campus. Her work has appeared in Nimrod, Hawai'i Review, Dalhousie Review, and Nexus. MICHEL DEGUY'S most recent book is *A ce qui n'en finit pas* (Seuil, 1995); he continues to edit the journal Poésie in Paris. WILSON BALDRIDGE's translation of Deguy's *Gisants (Recumbent Figures)* will be published by Wake Forest University Press in 1997; he also has a piece on translation forthcoming in the proceedings (Editions Belin) of the first international colloquium on the work of Michel Deguy held in Paris, June, 1995. This fall Potes & Poets Press will publish RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS's *Draft 15-XXX, The Fold;* an essay, "Manifests," is in a current issue of Diacritics. DAN FEATHERSTON lives in Tucson; forthcoming poetry, essays, and reviews in Cross-cultural Poetics, Poetic Briefs, and Synaesthetic. JORIE GRAHAM's most recent publication is *The Dream of the Unified Field (Selected Poems).* A new book, *The Errancy,* is due out in the spring from The Ecco Press. BENJAMIN HOLLANDER is the editor of *Translating Tradition: Paul Celan in France* (Acts, 1988). His more recent books include *How To Read, Too* (Leech, 1992) and *The Book Of Who Are Was* (Sun & Moon, 1996). GARRETT KALLEBERG'S poetry has recently appeared in Talisman and American Letters & Commentary; and is forthcoming in First Intensity and Mandorla. W.B. KECKLER has work in recent issues of Talisman, First Intensity and The Gertrude Stein Awards. He lives in Harrisburg PA. KEVIN KILLIAN's new play, "Wet Paint," the life of Jay De Feo, premiered in San Francisco in October. His forthcoming books include *Little Men* (Hard Press) and a novel, *Arctic Summer* (Richard Kasak Books). MICHAEL McCLURE'S newest book is a collaboration with sculptor Robert Graham, *Lie. Sit, Stand, Be Still* (Arion Press), GWYN McVAY is the author of a chapbook, *Brother Ikon* (Inkstone Press, 1996). Her work has appeared recently in Phoebe and The American Voice, and is forthcoming in Ascent, The Prose Poem, and Exquisite Corpse. TAM LIN NEVILLE's poetry has been published in Mademoiselle, American Poetry Review, Ironwood, Crazyhorse, and The Massachusetts Review, as well as in a number of anthologies. Her essays and reviews have appeared in The Threepenny Review, The Hungry Mind Review, and The American Poetry Review. Her chapbook, *Dreaming in Chinese,* won Calypso Press's first chapbook competition in 1995. JOHN OLSON's essay about poets in movies will be appearing in First Intensity, and a chapbook, *Swarm of Edges,* is forthcom-

ing. RON PADGETT'S most recent book is *New & Selected Poems* (Godine). Forthcoming is a nonfiction book, *Creative Reading* (National Council of Teachers of English). KRISTIN PREVALLET is an editor of Apex of the M, and is working on cataloging and editing he papers of Helen Adam. She lives in Buffalo. HEATHER RAMSDELL's poems have appeared in Mandorla, Torque, and Talisman. She recently completed her first book, *Lost Wax*. Besides PAUL CELAN, CATHERINE REYNOLDS, a recent graduate of The Naropa Institute (where she studied translation with Anselm Hollo), has translated Kurt Schwitters and Peter Handke's work. MARTA PETREU is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Shameless Poems* (1993). She is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cluj, and she edits the influential Romanian cultural and literary magazine, Apostrof. ADAM J. SORKIN'S most recent book, *The Sky Behind the Forest*, a selection of Liliana Ursu's work translated in collaboration with both Ursu and Tess Gallagher, is due out from Bloodaxe Books in November 1996. LIVIU BLEOCA is a writer, editor, and journalist who works as a librarian of the Romanian Academy in Cluj. He is the co-translator with Adam Sorkin of *Transylvanian Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Poets from Cluj-Napoca* (1994). DENNISON SMITH'S plays have been produced by the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, the Bread & Puppet Theatre in Glover, Vermont, and the Alchemy Theater in Chicago. *Window: a longpoem* is to be published by Letters Press (Toronto). KEITH TUMA'S most recent publication is the contributor's note you are now reading, *Jestures* #3. ROBERT VANDERMOLEN lives and paints houses in Grand Rapids. He had an NEA Poetry Fellowship in 1995. He has recently had poetry in Grand Street, Epoch, and Mudfish. ALLEN S. WEISS (at this moment giving a paper on Antonin Artaud at the Artaud Conference in Sidney, Australia) has recently edited a special issue of The Drama Review (T151) on "Experimental Sound and Radio." PAMELA WYE is represented by Luise Ross Gallery, NYC. She recently exhibited drawings at The Noyes Museum in Oceanville, NJ.

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